The Dissertation Committee for Dennis Michael Rathnaw certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Waiting for Gumbo:

Cargo Cults, Media and the Bikutsi of Cameroon

Committee:

_____
Veit Erlmann, Supervisor

_____
Toyin Falola

_____
Andrew Dell'Antonio

_____
James Denbow

_____
Robin Moore

Waiting for Gumbo:

Cargo Cults, Media and the Bikutsi of Cameroon

by

Dennis Michael Rathnaw, B.A; M.M.

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Painting by Mboko LaGriffe

For my sister Grace, my biggest fan, who fought for so long.
She wanted to see the world.

Tête brulée
Clair obscur
ZIG'LIBLURE
ISBALU

Pas négros
mais gros nez
et Négro
Bassaa né
Et basané
Eclair et brûlure
Mort en sourire
Sous rire mort
Rire en d´lire éclaté
Raison sans Etat
Etat de derision
Illuminations
Souvenirs et rêves
confondus dans la flame
charbon qui m'active le corps

SCHUBBAH

Bof
Beau ou pas
Je m'en fous
J'aime mes poux
Et si parfois j'ai l'air fou

SHUBBAH
JE SUIS SHUBBAH

A YIA-YIOOH
IYO-LOLOOH
A MBOMBA EEH
A SOGOL EEH

SCHUBBAH

Danse vaudou
Rythme de vie
CHOSE
J'OSE
Mon marabout luis sait où je vais

J’ai mangé le coer du hibou
De lui j’ai tous les atouts
Je suis prêt à tout
Jusqu’au bout de mes bouts

SCHUBBAH
JE SUIS SCHUBBAH

Je porte des boubous
J’ai dans les yeux des bijoux
Ma case est en bamboo
Mes meubles en bois d’acajou
Pas de sou
Pas de dessus
Pas de dessous
Pas de souci
Pas de déçu

SCHUBBAH

Je mange du fou-fou
Ma houe est dans la boue
La boue
Je l’ai jusqu’au cou
Mais coucou
Je ne fais pas la moue

SCHUBBAH

Mon frère est Zoulou
Mes femmes sont Papoues
Pas de tabou
De toutes je suis l’èpoux
J’ASSURE
Et quand je fais bisou
Aux Zazoux
Pas de jaloux
C’est nous nous

SCHUBBAH
JE SUIS SCHUBBAH

On me dit sal fou voyou
FAUX

Sacarification
Tatouage
Maquillage
Tous ces fards qui cafardent

SCHUBBAH

La nuit je fais jou-jou
Avec les NJU NJU
Cosmique
Cause mixte
Je conjugue le vérité
En parlant de nous
Aimer double
à multiplier par quatre
par cent
par mille

SCHUBBAH

You-you et tremolo à tue-tête
Pour accueillir le jour toujours nouveau
En depart
Pars avec les parts

A l'instant
Je fais l'amour avec l'air
Pour me confondre au rythme du soufflé
Et vivre dans la force du temps

SCHUBBAH
JE SUIS SCHUBBAH

You-you et tremolo à tue-tête
De la tête
Retour jusqu'au pied de la racine
Je pense donc je suis
Je danse donc je swing
TRANCE
Je suis IN
Je suis gai
Je suis fait
LION
ZION

ION
Je suis reggae dans la communion
de mon corps et de l'autre
SOUL POWER
Super
Je suis saoul
Agé juste de l'instant
Vibrations
Célébration
Incantation
Ouverture

SCHUBBAH
JE SUIS SCHUBBAH

Blasé
Bluesé par la raison du rien
L'absurde du vide
Le Bonheur qui se plaint
Je suis FUNKY
Ils font quoi
Je suis funk
Rock
Aussi dur que la peur
Eh pa SALSA
KWASSA-KWASSA
SA MAKOSSA
Si si ASSIKO
Un coup BIKOUTSI
Quoi?
Assez jazzé
Je fonce je défence
WOOGIE
Bougie
Et cette flame qi m'active le corps

SCHUBBAH
JE SUIS SCHUBBAH

Je suis homme
Je suis âme
Je suis faune
Je suis flamme

SCHUBBAH
Sur la terre qui m'ensemence
Et que je piétine

SCHUBBAH
Sur le flanc nu de la femme
Qui traverse le rêve

SCHUBBAH
Sur le temps qui passé
Et mon corps qui pisse
Moi en reste

from "orchestration verbale pour un hymne à la vie"
--MalNjam

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With all my love and gratitude, thank you all.

Waiting for Gumbo:

Cargo Cults, Media and the Bikutsi of Cameroon

Dennis Michael Rathnaw, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

Supervisor: Veit Erlmann

This dissertation examines the interaction between music, politics and the Cameroonian media in the production and role of the popular music called bikutsi. In the context of Cameroonian music, bikutsi had long been associated solely with the Beti region surrounding the capital of Yaoundé, and as such considered a marginal music patronized by the "villageois." Nevertheless, after Paul Biya assumed the presidency of Cameroon in 1982, and his subsequent inauguration of the Office de Télévision Nationale du Cameroun (Cameroon Radio and Television-CRTV) in 1985, bikutsi acquired the importance of a national music, and indeed a minor global phenomenon.

Using the politico-economic backdrop of capital at the millennium, I show how the ethos of neoliberalism has helped turn African nation-states such as Cameroon into what has been called "regimes of unreality," divorced from economic control, dependent on a multitude of development projects in the

manner of contemporary cargo cults, and left with only the semblance of fetishism with which to connect to its people. In recent years, however, the process of media liberalization has taken away the state media's ability to enact that message, and thus the regime's power of persuasion. Instead the populace is left with a new type of cargo, in the form of sounds and imagery to go along with the narrative of global consumer culture.

This has left an opportunity for those with the skill and imagination to make use of the new information, allowing artists, musicians and writers to be the next members of a new civil society. This is what I refer to as the emancipatory promise of the new cargo cult, where instead of capital accumulation there is only ephemera—signs, sounds and images that multiply and intensify in unpredictable and sometimes dangerous ways. I use the national lens of bikutsi to analyze these dynamics on a local and global level, in the city, the quartier and the village. Ultimately, understanding the media process and cargo has the ability to allow individuals to overcome the narrow vision of political machinery, and act as another potential cog in the civil society of meaningful relationships.

Table of Contents

List of Figures……...xv

Introduction: Cargo Cults for the New Millennium (radio trottoir).....……1

Chapter Two: Les Têtes Brulées Redux: Strategic Minstrelsy Goes Patriotic (radio one battery).....…….....55

Chapter Three: The Eroticization of Bikutsi: Reclaiming Female Space Through Popular Music and Media (radio kongosa)…….…….....…81

Chapter Four: Revisiting the Local Record Industry: the Formation of Digital Collectives in Cameroon (radio 33)…...…..……...……110

Chapter Five: Pour La Transparence: the CMC, the African Media Federation and the Failure of Organization (FM Malabo)...….....…129

Conclusion.....144

Bibliography……151

List of Figures

Figure 1: Gombo…….....……2

Figure 2: Immeuble de la Mort.…….....……11

Figure 3: Nju-Nju du Rond-Point.……...…….20

Figure 4: National Radio Archive.…….……31

.

Figure 5: Mvet…….....39

Figure 6: Mendzan tuning.…….....…….……..41

Figure 7: Mendzan xylophone.……...…….……..42

Figure 8: Deviance…….....…….……53

Figure 9: Jean Marie Ahanda from France……....63

Figure 10: Jean Marie Ahanda.……....…….…65

Figure 11: Ahanda at the Tribune…….....…….66

Figure 12: Early Les Têtes Brulées…….....……...68

Figure 13: Present day Martiens…….……..….70

Figure 14: Ahanda Painting Tunde……..……..71

Figure 15: Atebass, Tunde and Dennis……..……..72

Figure 16: Roger Bekongo…….....….74

Figure 17: The Transformation…….....…..75

Figure 18: Two-stepping in Yaoundé……..…….78

Figure 19: Petit Pays, King of Makossa Love……...……91

Figure 20: K-tino…….....….92

Figure 21: K-tino vid cap…….....……99

Figure 22: K-tino vid cap…….....…….99

Figure 23: Africrea…….....…….111

Figure 24: Studio Nyanga……...…….112

Figure 25: Studio Nyanga…….....……..112

Figure 26: Macase at rehearsal…….…….....……118

Figure 27: Mboa manifesto…….…….....……122

Figure 28: No pidgin…….…….....……126

Figure 29: Ruben Binam at work……..…….....……128

Figure 30: Sam Mbende campaign wear……..……...……133

Figure 31: African Media Federation……..……140

Figure 32: Pierre Moukoko and Ambassador Marquardt……142

Introduction

Cargo Cults for the New Millennium

Without it you can't make soup…

One night early in my fieldwork, in a cabaret in Yaoundé, I was struck by a performer working his way through the crowd in between the music sets. In his hands were marionette strings with which he controlled a three-foot high puppet dressed as a typical Cameroonian comic buffoon in oversized colorful clothes, long tie and blackface. The marionette walked in front of the manipulator, greeted patrons, danced bikutsi to the recorded music and finally stopped in front of me. It held up its hands and made as if to shrug its shoulders—really a quite remarkable performance. I turned to my friend and asked why the puppet had stopped. "He's waiting for gombo."

Gombo, like the Cajun stew, is a common and popular soup made throughout Cameroon. Its main ingredient is okra, which contributes to its rather slippery texture, and is eaten with corn fufu (pounded starch) called couscous. However, if you hear the word ten times, only one of them perhaps is someone referring to the food.

It is also money, often illicit, and I was to find in the coming months that giving and receiving gombo in the form of bribery or tip drove much of the dynamic in Cameroonian life. Just to make a living as a professional musician, for instance, meant traveling from cabaret to cabaret on any given night, playing a set here and a set there in order to "make gombo." Buskers would often wander in and out of restaurants playing popular guitar songs, or show up at the bus station during arrivals and departures in order to make a little gombo.

Figure 1: Gombo with couscous

Making gombo is a phenomenon far beyond tips, however. It is a tacitly sanctioned way to augment income at every level of society and government. For example, I was stopped on the street on many occasions by a traffic police who demanded papers and finally, "Ou est mon gombo?" In 2005, the Cameroonian

Ambassador to the United States, H.E. Mendouga, was brought under charges of embezzling 4.6 million dollars earmarked for embassy renovations. One response to the investigation team read, "Imagine the gumbo! Lots and lots of it. I tell you my brother, leave this man alone. He is filthy rich. He can damage you. His brother is [President] Biya. They chop together" (Adams 2005).

However, the most common public reference to the economics of gombo revolves around the practice of journalism, both in print and broadcast. It has long been assumed that journalists take bribes of gombo to praise state officials, cover up their crimes, and denounce their enemies. Pro-government journalists take bribes to praise the regime while pro-opposition journalists take bribes to denounce the regime. This is one of the means of ensuring state control of the media as well as dissemination of the party line.

Part of this issue is the constant lack of economic stability in the media sector, which makes gathering and producing the news difficult. Additionally, the tenuous nature of job security among journalists has affected objectivity and professionalism, and makes for less than credible news. These unethical practices are commonly known as *le journalisme de gombo,* which refers to the various forms of kickbacks, freebies, and rewards solicited by journalists and provided by various news actors to journalists (Nyamnjoh 2005: 158). One hears as well of *mon gombo personnel* (news sources) and interviews recorded on the *gombophone*.

Considering demand for self-regulation in an absence of mechanisms for enforcing standards or accountability, Ndangam sees the journalists' challenge as an "attempt to combine individual and collective notions of personhood with responsibilities to society and the journalism profession, in an environment of economic hardship and rampant corruption" (Ndamgan 2006). However, even if we acknowledge the creative means of making gombo for themselves, it is often a point of pride for some journalists to assert their non-reliance on the notorious brown envelopes.

Pius Njawe, publisher of *Le Messager* and often cited as the most staunch advocate for press freedom in Cameroon (arrested more than 100 times, jailed on three occasions) has stated in interview that in a context of constant harassment, journalists doing their job properly above all means "avoiding 'gumbo journalism', a practice increasingly widespread in our profession, where people write what they are paid to write instead of giving real information and the truth. While journalists have the right to earn a decent living, even in emerging nations, honest journalists never need pockets in their shrouds…" (Njawe 2006).

Gombo journalism goes a long way toward explaining the popular reliance on *radio trottoir*, or sidewalk radio, which is the circulation of rumor and exaggeration meant to overcome the deficiency of real information. However, with the onset of private and seemingly less controllable or accountable media, what are to be the new roles of those who still wait for gombo?

The bikutsi is everywhere...

That was the very first statement I heard in response to my project, and perhaps there is nothing quite so confidence inspiring, or terrifying, as knowing at least that your data exists, somewhere, Out There. And she was right; bikutsi informs every aspect of Cameroonian society, at every level. It is always a part of the conversation, the experience, or maybe lurking just below the surface. By its production, consumption and signification, bikutsi is a stake in the political, media and religious game, aside from the personal and lived experience.

The phenomenon of bikutsi is not limited to the southern Cameroon Beti group from which it comes. Between the mid-80s and mid-90s, the song *Essingan* by the great bikutsi band Les Têtes Brulées became the unofficial anthem of the nation, crossing ethnic, linguistic and religious boundaries. Essingan is the largest tree in the rainforest, and among Beti folklore, a great man is often referred to as essingan for his stoutness and courage. “Back then, everyone was Beti,” I was told, over and again. Surely this song had more import and significance than Biya’s own personal national anthem to himself.

Bikutsi links everything and everyone together, including the elite, the popular and the working class, all annexed to the state and intimately tied to local government machinery. What this is embedded in and what it comes out of, and

ultimately, how it all unravels at ground level are the questions that remain to be asked.

Therefore this dissertation examines the interaction between music, politics and the Cameroonian media in the production and role of the popular music called bikutsi. In the context of Cameroonian music, bikutsi had long been associated solely with the Beti region surrounding the capital of Yaoundé, and as such considered a marginal music patronized by the "villageois." Nevertheless, after Paul Biya assumed the presidency of Cameroon in 1982, and his subsequent inauguration of the Office de Télévision Nationale du Cameroun (Cameroon Radio and Television-CRTV) in 1985, bikutsi acquired the importance of a national music, and indeed a minor global phenomenon.

Clearly, bikutsi could not have achieved this degree of prominence without the backing of President Biya, a Beti and great bikutsi fan, and contingent government support. However, this does not take into account the currents in Cameroonian society that make bikutsi possible, and indeed link it to all levels of popular culture from working class to elite, in spite of it being intimately tied to local government machinery. This work specifically analyzes how bikutsi fills in the gaps between local voices, politics and the media, and focuses on the different levels, aside from the musical, on which bikutsi plays. In light of the failing government control of the mass media, this project is of critical importance, as music is a valuable means for examining the processes by which actors find the ability to craft a voice out of tight places. I follow the lead of noted Cameroonian

scholar Achille Mbembe, who calls for scholars of Africa to give as intelligible an account as possible of the political imagination and political, social and cultural reality in Africa today (Mbembe 2001).

More specifically, I started with the three basic terms of music, politics, and media, which at the time seemed overly simplistic and painfully obvious. And yet, in a country such as Cameroon, which has enjoyed/suffered the relative stability of only 2 presidents since independence in 1960, it is impossible to extricate one term from the other. Each and every facet of public life, be it expressive culture, the governance by a euphemistically benign dictatorship (nee multiparty democracy), or the sounds and imagery that tie them together, helps maintain a Bourdieu-like sense of misrecognition for the government, concurrently playing a role in the tactics of those below who struggle to find effective means to act.

Cameroon, like other developing countries, has been the recipient of numerous development projects. Whatever strings may have come attached, one can point around the city and countryside to the hospitals built by China, schools built by France, rainforest roads developed by Brazil, even the national television studio donated by Germany. And this has become an issue for local perception. One night the conversation at a local bar turned to the topic of largesse, and of government apathy, and an animated patron stood up and proclaimed, “Everyone here is waiting for the White to come and give him money, and build his house. Maybe they need the White to come and fuck his woman for him as well.”

And at the time, it occurred to me that this did indeed resemble the dynamic of goods that were expected to arrive from the mythical cargo ships of the South Pacific. Perhaps the ancestors were finally paying off. And perhaps not enough. For instance, I later discovered much of the recording equipment at the CRTV to be in a state of non-repair, which it turned out had been the case for years. When I asked why it hadn't been repaired, a department head related a story of how the Germans (Siemens) had actually offered to come to Cameroon and repair the equipment. However a number of directors insisted on being flown to Germany for training on repair. And an extended holiday. The offer was closed, and the equipment remains inactive.

Stepping backward and putting this into a political perspective gives the context for what eventually becomes my imagining of a new cargo cult for the twenty-first century. Capital at the end of the millennium, or what the Comaroffs calls "messianic capital" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 2), has helped turn African nation-states such as Cameroon into what Mbembe refers to as "regimes of unreality" (Mbembe 2001), portrayed as a gospel of salvation, capable of wholly transforming the marginalized and disempowered. Here rational market capitalism finally inhabits the last uncharted bastion of time/space, or in our case, the equivalents of audio and visual, where the nation/state, and therefore government are forcibly distanced from and real sense of capital accumulation. And this process necessarily has to do with the increasing relevance of consumption, the shaping of selfhood, society and identity. As well, the nature of

social class under such political and economic conditions place a growing stress on gender and race as indices of identity. Thus divorced from economic control, the only connection left to the people for the sham state is the rule by force.

Liberal democracy and the version of development it inspires promises political, economic and cultural enrichment for all. But in reality a hidden hand of capital--the West--determines who among the many shall be provided for. And Nyamnjoh notes that its rhetoric of opening up, and of abundance, is squarely contradicted by the reality of closures and of want for most of its disciples. The hidden hand of global capital and its concerns, for example, through the IMF, World Bank and national interests of Western partners, make it possible "for autocracy to pay lip service to democracy and development in exchange for guaranteeing the political stability needed by investors to venture into the periphery. In exchange for having weak foreign relations, autocratic regimes like Cameroon's are afforded the ability and protection to flex their muscles within their own countries, in a perplexing and mystical manner" (Nyamnjoh 2001: 35)

The crux of this argument is the shift in the nature of capitalism. The workplace is no longer the primary site of creation of value, the factory disappears and labor is moved elsewhere. The turn is to the market and speculation, and to generating wealth by less tangible means such as services, communication and the flow of finance. Yet as the Comoroffs have pointed out, there is no such thing as capitalism sans production. In experiential terms, especially in the developing world, the core of messianic capital seems to include but to marginalize, produce

desire and expectation yet decrease the certainty of work or security. How these processes play out have much to do with current crises of nostalgia for repressive regimes, the increasing importance of identity and inclusion, and the fear, especially in Africa, of the preternatural production of wealth.

Neo liberalism aspires in its ideology and practice to intensify the abstraction inherent in capitalism itself, to separate labor power from its human context and to replace society with the market. "In the magicality of the state in the age of millennial capital, ritual excess stand as alibis for realpolitik—which recedes ever farther as its surfaces are visible primarily through the glassy essence of television, the tidal swirl of radio waves, the fine print of the press" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 38).

Figure 2: Immeuble de la Mort, Biya's downtown centerpiece, unfinished for twenty years

And for the last few decades, at least as far as Cameroon and the CRTV is concerned, the state owned and controlled media was obliged to play along, relaying the fetish of the state in all its glory. But the advent of satellite cable, the Internet, increased mobility and global pressure has eroded those same safe

networks. In recent years the media infrastructure has begun to overflow, with pirate and private radio, independent television under control from foreign countries, and all with a distinct lack of government flavor. The flood of new sounds and images, the actual soundtrack and narrative of global consumer culture, has left an enormous opportunity for those with the skill and imagination to make use of the new information. Artists, musicians and writers have become media experts as McLuhan predicted, best equipped to navigate the morass of consumer ecstasy.

McLuhan's fundamental premise is that media is a technological simulation of consciousness, an extension of our central nervous system. It collapses time and space, and through it, all technologies can be translated into information systems. Both media and technology are fraught with dangers, mainly centered around the concept of misrecognition. According to McLuhan, artists are able to apprehend messages of cultural and technological change before the impact occurs. The artist is a "man of integral awareness," and can grasp implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. Thus, if one could read the so called "signs of the times" in contemporary art, one would have the information on how to re-arrange one's psyche in order to anticipate the next blow from our own extended faculties.

What does this mean in terms of the contemporary cargo cult? Everyone is waiting for the things that could allow them to become players on the world stage. Cargo is no longer the goods coming off planes, but in media images that make up

the local imaginary. Today the youth belong to Coupé Décalé, the reigning pop/dance style since the early part of the decade. Though associated with Cote d'Ivoire, the music actually originated amongst Ivorian immigrants in Paris. It's a mostly laptop generated sound, heavy with Congolese rhythm samples, thick bass and minimal guitar and keyboard arrangements. Although repetitive and uninteresting on a musical level, it offers the rapper/dj an opportunity to freestyle about the good life, extolling the virtues of bonne ambience. Appropriately, videos are always shot in extravagant venues, or surrounded by expensive props such as a Ferrari or Lamborghini, and the musicians are always expensively dressed, sporting designer sunglasses and extra long cigars. It is extravagant excess at its best. Literally, coupé décalé means to cut and re-arrange, referring to the style of production involved. However, in local slang, coupé is to cheat, while décalé is to run, thus a sense of protest or paean to those who can succeed by guile or rather "stick it to the man" so to speak.

Borrowing from the previous worldbeat model of reggae as default global soundtrack, we find the trope of emancipation is alive and well, but it has moved from the political/religious to the sphere of capital and excess, from the spiritual realm to the one of pure exchange value. Whereas reggae once promised African youth the redemption of Rastafarianism, itself a failed political movement turned religion, Coupé Décalé fuses the deliverance of reggae through hip-hop’s modern vehicle of excess and conspicuous consumption. Emancipation by capital gain.

And this is what I will call the emancipatory promise of the new cargo cult, where instead of capital accumulation there is only ephemera—signs, sounds and images--and they multiply and intensify in unpredictable and sometimes dangerous ways. I use the national lens of bikutsi to analyze these dynamics on a local and global level, in the city, the quartier and the village. Ultimately, understanding the media process and cargo has the ability to allow individuals to overcome the narrow vision of political machinery, as well as act as another potential cog in civil society.

African and Cameroonian Scholarship

Existing scholarship on popular music, or music in general in Cameroon is sparse. There is the classic by Francis Bebey entitled *African Music, A People's Art* (Bebey 1969). While an ambitious project for the time, and a wonderful collection of photographs and recordings from a Cameroonian scholar, the book is too far-reaching and in some cases actually in error. In light of current scholarship, we have to consider it somewhat out of date. Other smaller works on specific topics exist: the excellent and highly empirical Ngumu book on mendzan, though woefully short (Ngumu 1976), a small biography on singer Anne Marie Nzié (Tagne 1990), and more recently another small and highly opinionated work on bikutsi (Noah 2002).

Most recent is Ignatowski's *Journey of Song: Public Life and Morality in Cameroon,* which gives a well-written perspective from a former Peace Corp worker who travels back to her village in the far north of Cameroon to study the composition and performance of annual Tupuri song and dance celebrations (Ignatowski 2006). Currently, there is research being done in the grassfields area of Cameroon, comprising the mostly Anglophone area and Bamiléke homelands. A forthcoming work by SIL member and UCLA graduate Brian Schragg will isolate malleable infrastructures of Bamiléke traditional song and document the re-composition of texts that follow closer to Christian themes.

None of this work, however, engages on a popular level, with the political realm or the media, and not in an empirical and qualitative manner. In fact, very few qualitative ethnographies have been written on the expressive culture of Central Africa in the past decade, and certainly none situated in Cameroon that have understood the production of culture as irrevocably embedded in the political and media situation from which they come, and in which they circulate.

In other Africanist ethnomusicology, Erlmann's *Nightsong* points toward utilizing new theoretical models in order to study the connections between music, performance, power, and resistance (Erlmann 1996). As well, Kisliuk works to deconstruct the boundaries between ethnographic subject and object through an exploration of the BaAka people of Central African Republic. Her style of performance ethnography refers not only to the ethnography of performance but also emphasizes the performative nature of fieldwork (Kisliuk 2001). In *Jùjú*,

Waterman explores the invocation of the traditional in an urban context, and illustrates how new meanings are assigned in contemporary social space. Ultimately by deconstructing monolithic notions of African ethnic purity, and the stability of tradition, Waterman shows human agency in musical production and the reality of the lived experience of postcolonial Africa (Waterman 1990). In *Sound of Africa!* Meintjes illustrates how the production of ethnicity is a process that actors undergo with particular political and social agendas in mind. She shows that the production of "Zuluness" is not limited to sounds and images, but how these sounds and images circulate in political spheres (Meintjes 2003). Finally, Turino adds to the literature of Zimbabwe by describing music, dance and theatre as raw material for a cultural production immersed in a capitalist economy (Turino 2000).

Perhaps the only current musical monograph in Francophone Africa to currently address these issues is Bob White's *Rumba Rules* (White 2008). White situates one of the most popular and pervasive musical genres in Africa firmly in the arc of Mobutu Sese Seko's political regime, and explores the mobility of musicians and the successes and failures of rumba and soukous in the political economy of Mobutu's cultural policy. White is engaging and one gets the sense of the import of his theoretical applications for other works in other countries. However, there is more to be said for the media, the single most important tool in a political sphere that relied wholly on the power of the state fetish.

My work therefore, is engaged with a number of Central African scholars whose work addresses these very issues. Francis Beng Nyamnjoh has written extensively on the Cameroonian media and political sphere since 1989. His work casts a broad net over issues of democratization and political economy, tribalism and witchcraft, music and politics, and issues of exclusion and belonging (Nyamnjoh 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001, 1996, 1989). As well, Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe paints a subtle picture of the postcolony under Cameroonian rule. Indeed it is impossible to think of the country with his notions of power, vulgarity and *commandement* to explain the behavior of the state, the masses and there complicity (Mbembe 2001, 1996). Finally, my work is indebted to Jean-François Bayart for his ability to make large conceptual processes meaningful, and entertaining, at very small levels (Bayart 1999, 1993, 1985).

The Political

The first term in my triptych of understanding this problem is the political, and what that really means here is the ethos of millennial capitalism and the discourses, intricacies and contradictions inherent in the culture of neoliberalism that it contains. Comaroff and Comaroff refer to the promise of millennial capital as having the capacity to wholly transform the universe of the marginalized and

disempowered. And yet they are careful to point out that because of decontextualization and the distantiation from place and its socioeconomic pressures, for the vast majority the millennial moment passed without visible enrichment.

The general strategy (and hope) of millennial capital says that removing state distortions of markets should create the conditions for economic growth, while rapid privatization would yield a flood of new private capital investment. Unfortunately, it also intensifies the abstraction in inherent in capitalism itself by separating labor power from its human context, and by continuously replacing society with the market itself. And as Bourdieu has pointed out, this is nothing more than the implementation of a utopia—the utopia of neoliberalism—thus converted to a political problem. For him, neoliberalism favors severing the economy from social realities, thereby constructing and economic system conforming to its description in pure theory (Bourdieu 1998).

How is this specifically important for Africa? James Ferguson has astutely noted that the ideology of neoliberalism has served to deconstruct the grand narratives of globalization, at least as far as Africa is concerned. Rather than the persuasive and totalizing urge of homogenization that is normally feared, global links in Africa connect in a selective, discontinuous and point-to-point fashion. Globalization has not brought consumer culture within reach of most Africans, nor the homogenization of lifestyle that normally encompasses. Rather, he says, "globalization has brought an increasingly acute awareness of the semiotic and

material goods of the global rich, even as economic pauperization and the loss of faith in the promises of development have made the chances of actually attaining such goods seem more remote than ever." (Ferguson 2000: 21).

And that is the point. The idea that people assert global membership by other methods, often as he says, "through a brilliantly inventive bricolage of scraps and leftovers, is a fact more likely to be celebrated by the cultural analyst than by the "locals" themselves, who may see such practices more as signs of weakness than of strength." And I admit, I am just as much to blame. In my first weeks in Douala, I was struck by the enormous public statue Nouvelle Liberté, a work by the notable sculptor Joseph Sumégné, and made entirely of garbage. I immediately noted to my associates that I would have to come back for a proper photo session, as this was going to be the cover of a future book. I was enthralled, and they were disgusted. "That's *nju nju (witchcraft)*, and terribly ugly. No one likes that thing."

Figure 3: Nju-Nju du Rond-Point (Rond-Point Deido)

As it turns out, “Nouvelle Liberté” lies at the heart of multiple debates regarding public space and ownership, fetishism and the fear of witchcraft, and of what Nyamnjoh refers to as the “politics of belonging” (Nyamnjoh 2005).

Sumégné's work was commissioned in 1996 as an artistic and urban planning intervention by the Dutch NGO iStrike and a local arts council called

Doual'art, owned by Marilyn Douala Bell. Bell is better known as granddaughter to the famous King Rudolph Douala Manga Bell who was hanged, and thus martyred for organizing resistance forces against German colonialists in 1914. Marilyn Bell used privately secured funds to mount Sumégné's work, but before it was finished, controversy halted its installation more than once. The figure stands about 40 feet high in the middle of the Deido roundabout, one of the most visible and high-traffic crossroads in Douala. And although public space in Cameroon is generally occupied space, the vendors and traffic police that once occupied the circle now stay clear, having chosen instead to set up shop on the opposite sides of the street.

In an interview, Sumégné offered the statue as a critique of New York's Statue of Liberty. Instead of a torch shining for enlightenment and wisdom, Sumégné sees violence and destruction, and his Liberty holds up a globe as the object of that violence. Its leg is raised and the arms are bent in an attitude of exertion, for as he says, Liberty must be constantly maintained. However the results are ambiguous, since it might also be seen as a figure in dance, exhibiting a broad but disconcerting smile that seems to welcome drivers from downtown. The sculpture, like all of Sumégné's works of "récupération," is constructed entirely of discarded mechanical and electrical parts from cars or appliances, and strung together with wire and cable. It may evoke the humanity of the Statue of Liberty, but it also strikes one as robotic, and while it bears the resemblance of

traditional African sculpture writ large, it speaks as a futuristic version as well (Hanussek 2007).

What is interesting, however, is how locals of Deido react to it, beyond its so-called "rubbish aesthetic." Some people I met were unaware of the work's real name, but in fact everyone knew the reference "Nju-Nju du Rond Point." Not long after the sculpture was installed, the work was rumored to contain witchcraft, and locals avoided it while threatening both Doual'art and Sumégné.

Christian Hanussek's work on art in public spaces addresses the notion of fetishism and magic in machine aesthetics.

> The fragments of machines and electrical appliances, in place of the figure's bones and organs, are laid bare without a protective skin. Produced on other continents and circulating globally, they represent a world that is out of reach for most Africans. They represent a threat which has the power to question one's own culture and one's own skills. Every récupération piece can therefore be regarded as a fetish, which takes in the foreign, fragmented objects, thereby taming and keeping them under control (Hanussek 2007).

That reading doesn't go far enough to explain the local fear of the statue, however, or address the struggle over control of public space this particular narrative of witchcraft contains. I suggest Austen's definition of witchcraft as an alternative discourse to market rationality and modernity, and as a practice aimed against the powerful and wealthy (Austen 1993: 92). The idea that Sumégné, a Bamiléké operating in what had been historically a Sawa quartier and city, was infringing upon the space already being rapidly bought and populated by Bamiléké land developers goes further toward an explanation of nju-nju

allegations, and the rumor that the statue could clone itself during the night and appear at different places throughout Douala.

This then, also becomes a contestation between ethnic and public space as well, where Bamiléké now outnumber Sawa by a 3:1 ratio, and dominate business and increasingly political affairs. Returning then to the politics of belonging, Nyamnjoh contends that ethnicity and belonging remain active forces in African daily life. "As ethnic groups--local majorities or minorities--clamour for status, they are countered by an often aggressive reaffirmation of age-old exclusions informed by colonial registers of inequalities among the subjected (Nymanjoh 2005: 233)". The rhetoric of free flows and dissolving boundaries, of neoliberalism and globalization as well, instead create an atmosphere of closures and exclusion, and a greater obsession with belonging, whether between local communities in the quartier, or nation-states in the globality.

Ferguson also rightly claims the idea that deregulation and privatization would prove a panacea for African economic stagnation was a dangerous and destructive illusion, as Africa has suffered the lowest rates of economic growth ever recorded, along with increasing inequality and marginalization. What this says about Cameroon in particular lies in the way many African states have withdrawn from their national societies and obligations, leaving export production guarded and detached from their surrounding societies. And as Mbembe has noted, all that is left at that point is the fetish of the state. This ritual is enacted on

the public through visual imagery and discourse until a certain political consciousness is affected (Mbembe 2001: 103).

The exercise of power in African states since independence--generalized for Mbembe under the term the 'postcolony'--has been marked by a liking for the ceremonial and by an exhibitionism that is the more remarkable considering how illusory the states' practical achievements. In the postcolongy, the *commandement* seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimization and hegemony in the form of a fetish, an object that aspires to be made sacred. The signs and symbols are officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to challenge. This brings us to the media as the most important tool for legitimizing those symbols.

The Media

"Ordinary Africans are determined to be part of the technological revolutions of the modern world, even if this means accessing the information superhighway on foot, horseback, bicycles, bush taxis and second-hand cars" (Nymanjoh 2005: 4). The overwhelming majority of mass communication media theory is based on data from the United States and Great Britain. Thus issues of power, the state, conflict, societal change, the economy, institutionalized racism

and ethnic insurgency, secrecy and surveillance have tended to be marginalized in the literature. However, as John Downing has pointed out, media and their cultural expressions are a pivotal dimension of the struggle for power that is muted but ever-present in dictatorial regimes (Downing 1996).

That struggle then develops between political movements and the authoritarian state. Alternative media then, give voice to these movements, and are central to understanding the movement process itself. And of course, in Africa as well as most places, it is essential to include all forms of media--graffiti, cartoon, theatre, religious observance, music--into the debate to form a more complete analysis.

The history and development of the media in Africa, and especially West Africa where the most research and literature exist, is tied as one might expect to the history of colonialism. It is said that the British press was designed by the British, for the British, and the same with the French.

Among the challenges inherent in the developing media of postcolonial Africa, Ugboajah points to the issue of indigenous programming and language use as central to local effectiveness, and highlights the importance of national policies to stimulate the development of local programming (Ugboajah 1985). The second challenge is the linkage between African broadcasters, editors and producers and the Western models they continue to follow, rather than finding formats appropriate to the cultural context of the region. Finally, there is the continued

problem central to government run media agencies of information diffusion, such as crisis news and the international wire service.

Most studies of media in Africa tend to do with democratization issues. Considering economic liberalization and political democratization, media has come to play a much greater role than ever since independence. However, the place of communication theory hasn't received a great amount of attention since the heyday of modernization thinking in the 50s and 60s.

Hyden and Leslie argue that privately owned media have been in the forefront of creating political space for other actors in the public arena and enhancing the extent to which public officials have to consider themselves accountable to the citizenry (Hyden, Leslie, Ogundimu 2002).

Their work media and democracy in Africa focuses on the same recurring themes, at least in the cultural realm: the extent to which the ongoing globalization is creating a cultural dependence on values that contradict those that may have guided African social and political relations to date, and the significance of informal media that are peculiar to the African societies because of the prevalence of an oral tradition and the relative weakness of formal institutions.

Nyamnjoh has probably written most extensively on the role of the media in Africa, using Cameroon specifically as his data model. Mostly examining the role played by the media in the democratization process of the 1990s, he contends that if civil society is crucial for democracy (and he thinks it is), then communication networks are even more so. He furthers Ugboajah's argument that

culturally, the media are victims of an imposed hierarchy of national and world cultural, while at the same time excluding African world views and cultural values that do not guarantee profitability (Nyamnjoh 2005: 2). The consequence is an idea of democracy not informed by popular articulations of personhood and agency in Africa, and media whose professional values are not in tune with the expectations of those they purport to serve.

Nyamnjoh has a special attraction to the possibilities of the Internet, however, considering the rapid pace of expansion, and the fact that every African country currently has access. "Even as part of the global grip of the commercial media moguls, which Africa is bound to become eventually, the Internet could serve as a formidable tool for consumer mobilization towards exacting greater accountability and cultural relevance for media products targeting African audiences in the continent and the diaspora" (Nyamnjoh 2005: 15).

Media in Cameroon

In Cameroon, the problem with enacting the state fetish is maintaining control of the stage. Until recently this hadn't been an issue. Since Independence, government declarations have often stressed the importance of the media in the attainment of cultural, economic and political development objectives. It has, as well, called upon the media to play a leading role in disseminating information

and mobilizing Cameroonians toward self-reliance, autonomy and independence in economic, cultural and political matters.

And yet, it remains the only African country to practice legal pre-publication censorship of the press. Article 14 (which replaces other laws equally rigorous) of the "Freedom of Mass Communication" bill, enacted in December of 1990 requires newspapers to submit their copy to the Senior Divisional Officer before they can be printed. As well, Article 17 allows the same officer to seize any publication deemed inappropriate, while giving the Minister of Territorial Administration the right to ban the publication altogether (Maja-Pearce 1996: 52).

Public announcements are periodically made to the contrary, possibly to assuage foreign aid organizations. In September of 1994, the Minister of Communications, Augustin Kontchou Kouomengi, declared that "government censorship no longer deserves a place in our beloved, beautiful country" (1996: 53). Meanwhile, editors, publishers, and vendors are subjected to countless documented incidents of harassment, arrest, seizure and death threats. In my own experience, I witnessed the riots that resulted in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in 1999 when the publisher and editor of a leading independent weekly, which had recently criticized the president's brother for killing his chauffeur, died when his Range Rover mysteriously blew up on the outskirts of town. The papers reported it as an accident, which caused an outrage among the disbelieving public.

Cameroon's politics, its media and music are inextricably tied together. Since gaining independence in 1960, Cameroon has known only two presidents.

Ahmadu Ahidjo created the first constitution in 1961, and established a highly centralized political system in which all power resided in the presidency (DeLancey 1990: 51). His tenure was marked by suppression of human rights, and repression was the rule. Freedom of speech, the radio and the press was severely curtailed by censorship laws on the books since 1966, and today Cameroon remains the only country on the African continent that practices pre-publication censorship of the press.

Paul Biya, a Beti from the Yaoundé region, overthrew Ahidjo in 1982, and while state centralization and oppression have only increased, Biya can be noted for having inaugurated the Office de Télévision Nationale du Cameroun (Cameroon Radio Television-CRTV) in 1985. Under both internal and external pressure, Biya officially repealed the censorship laws in 1996, but they are still enforced by measures of intimidation, arrests, detention, seizure and fines (Maja-Pearce 1996).

Because of this stringent self-censorship in addition to lack of advertising revenue and skilled manpower have forced the independent press to produce sporadic weeklies and bi-monthlies, which often concentrate on sports and crime news (Jong-Ebot 1989). In fact, of the more than 500 newspapers on legal record, only the government-sponsored "Cameroun Tribune" publishes daily. Additionally, government-owned radio operates all thirteen stations, and the state remains a de facto monopoly of the audio-visual sector.

According to Article 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, CRTV covers about 80% of the country, yet even after formally abolishing its broadcast monopoly, the government has yet to implement regulations for the licensing of private stations (Article 19 1999). Thus, radio and television broadcasting continues to be a virtual monopoly of the state, and freedom of expression largely a sham. Newspapers can be banned or seized, and there continues an ongoing campaign of criminal prosecution against journalists.

It is no surprise, then, that Cameroonians rely heavily on international broadcasters such as the BBC and Voice of America, along with Western publications for their information of the world and Cameroon itself. Francis Nyamnjoh has remarked that Cameroonians are "shaped far more by foreign publications than by the local press," and that these publications reflected a social, economic and cultural reality that is in no way Cameroonian (Nyamnjoh 1990: 72).

Figure 4: National Radio Archive

Press

Cameroon's "golden age" of freedom of expression probably occurred in the mid-fifties as increasing pressure from pro-independence groups forced France towards concessions, resulting in the *Loi Cadre* of 1956, and a plethora of news titles, each supporting a newly formed political party and each lasting about as long as that party. By 1959, there were 91 political groups and 71 publications (all in French). Before independence, there existed no British-supervised or

English language press, the British Cameroons making due with coverage from Nigeria. Despite their late start, however, British Cameroon inherited a free press tradition from the British-influenced Nigeria. According to Nyamnjoh, English papers (Times, Champion, Observer, Mirror, Post) had more in common with the "freer spirit of the Nigerian Press (modeled after the Anglo-Saxon tradition) than with the heavily censored French Cameroon alternative (modeled after the French or Latin Tradition)" (Nyamnjoh 1990: 59).

After independence in January of 1960, President Ahidjo not only retained the spirit of repression established by the French, but backed by a French government eager to keep a moderate in power (in order to avoid another radical "total liberation a la Sekou Toure"), increased the severity of censorship effectively stifling the opposing UPC party and all those with a desire for greater democratic pluralism and participation. Soon after Ahidjo took office, there remained only one paper of fifteen in circulation.

Radio

France began broadcasting with one transmitter from Douala in 1941, mainly to assist Free French military efforts. Until 1953 Radio Douala was capable of only 2-300 watts and available for broadcasting less than an hour a day. That was to remain Cameroon's only radio station until 1955 when a second transmitter was installed at Yaoundé. According to Nyamnjoh, French radio

supported the French policy of exporting language and culture at the expense of local interests, perhaps in part a response to fears of being overtaken in expansionist roles set by others like Great Britain. But while the BBC worked to broadcast in major African languages, the RFI continued only in French, with the conviction that language and culture go hand in hand.

In 1955 radio equipment was upgraded and power increased. Also, the Studio Ecole was founded in Paris to train African technicians, journalists and animators. By 1956, and the Loi Cadre, which granted limited autonomy to colonial territories, all station management was transferred to the French Overseas Radio Broadcasting Company (La Société de Radio-diffusion d'Outre-Mer), which was in charge of construction, equipment and administration of all overseas stations. In 1973, three more stations were added to Faroua, Yaoundé and Buea.

Though these measures were purportedly taken to organize and train communities in their own running of local stations, Francophone Africa is still largely dependent on programs made and broadcast from Paris, in French, about France and French culture. Since the advent of television in Cameroon, the French have taken equivalent steps to ensure that American television programs don't threaten the French influence over Francophone Africa.

Television

In 1962, Cameroon was one of sixteen countries with plans to introduce television in the near future. Then President Ahidjo had the foresight to envision the new media as a tool that would be employed to help solve the problems of development that faced Cameroon. As he stated in 1963,

> "The setting up of a TV network does not automatically mean that rich programmes would be broadcast. In this area, it is necessary to anticipate and to draw up beforehand, an elaborate plan and a stock of educative and entertainment programmes with the indispensable help of cinematographic techniques…with the aim of adapting…our future TV broadcasts to the real needs of our audience, by entertaining them with the greatest number possible of programmes that are truly Cameroonian and African, and, in every way, accessible to the nature and taste of the majority of viewers" (Nyamnjoh 1989: 36).

Ahidjo took the view that his country should produce its own programs, and that these programs should reflect the Cameroonian way of life. It would seem that, armed with the results of countless feasibility studies, and blessed with media and cultural experts such as writer, composer and musician Francis Bebey, all that was missing, in Nyamnjoh's words, "was someone to shout 'Open Sesame,' and the competent staff, together with the rich educative Cameroonian and African programs would appear.

Unfortunately, Ahidjo's government completely neglected to prepare for TV by training the technical personal and producers who supposedly were to conceive programs of socio-cultural relevance. Furthermore, he did nothing to encourage film production. Cameroon was to wait another twenty-three years for

television, which was eventually inaugurated without proper equipment, programs, or personnel.

Under President Biya, CTV first broadcast from the city of Bamenda on 20 March, 1985, from a mobile reporting van, for lack of equipment. Its first program coincided with the Fourth Ordinary Congress of the Cameroon National Union, marking the birth of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). However auspicious was its inauguration, further broadcasts were tentative, and included Presidential activities, the visit of Pope John-Paul II and the African Nations Cup. In December of 1985, CTV upped its broadcasts to twice weekly, and Siemens donated new equipment to the National Theatre in Yaoundé. A year later they were able to operate four times a week.

Among the biggest problems faced in the opening years was the lack of trained personnel, some of which were on loan from Cameroon Radio. Of course, sensing the opportunities of an open media, sympathetic countries offered to train as many Cameroonians as needed. However, Biya would not allow this, fearing the return of technicians steeped in Western media culture, values and practices. Be that as it may, after only two full years in operation, CTV was responsible for only ten percent of its own programming, the balance coming from France, Britain and the United States, thus virtually invalidating the 23-year precautions undertaken by Ahidjo.

Independent Media

Considering the difficulty in regulating pirate radio, the absence of formal procedures for which independent media can apply for private broadcasting licenses has been particularly effective at keeping Cameroon's airwaves free of non-government-sanctioned programming. It was not until 1997 that a loophole allowing "community" stations, as opposed to "private" stations, access to the air prompted a Canadian-funded project to inaugurate five rural stations in remote areas of the country in which CRTV did not reach.

Perhaps admitting that the government allows community radio despite governing licenses is an overstatement. Each radio station, one planned for Oku in the Northwest, Mamfe in the Southwest, Foutouni in the West, Lolodorf in the South and Dana in the Far North, is capable of five kilowatts each, barely enough power to reach the sparsely populated areas they are aiming for. And while the sponsors' hopes are for a quality forum independent of CRTV, the specific government agenda states the radio stations' purpose is not news, but rather "to allow the expression of the voice of rural communities as a means of communication…to promote their greater welfare; to support and underpin socio-economic development initiatives and activities at a local level; and to improve the standing of traditional knowledge" (Article 19 1997: 14).

Recently however, broadcasters have given up waiting for licenses. The obligatory pre-press screen for objectionable news content has subsided. And the first independent television stations began broadcasting during my fieldwork

tenure. Partly due to government apathy, partly due to ease of digital communication, and partly due to the tireless efforts of information freedom fighters such as *Messager*/Freedom FM's Pius Njawe, the major newspapers aside from the pro-government *Tribune* include *Mutations*, *La Nouvelle Expression* and *Le Messager*, each publishing daily and boasting between 10,000 and 17,000 in readership. Private electronic media, notably radio, now includes Magic FM, Radio Reine (Catholic), Radio Venus, Radio Télévision Lumière, Sky FM and Radio Siantou in Yaoundé alone, with a handful of others in Douala and other major regional cities. Finally, and most importantly, there were two fledgling television stations in Douala and one in Yaoundé. The largest concern, STV-Dla stressed urban culture and youth empowerment movements, and had the financial backing of MTN, the largest cell provider in Cameroon.

The Music

It is always said that the name bikutsi comes from the Ewondo words "kut" and "si." The verb kut means to fight or slap. Bi makes it a plural form. Si refers to the ground or earth. Therefore, literally, bikutsi is to stamp the ground, repetitively. From the Ministry of Culture *Guide to Dances from Cameroon*, Stanislas Awona writes this:

> The term Bikutsi has an early material origin: just in the night with the clear moon, the women were reuniting to sing, dance, and share their ideas according to a language known by them only, they delivered the frenetic dances in rhythms rudely stamped to the ground with their feet: from where the name “Bikutsi” (literally “dance stamping-ground”) gave not only to their wriggling about, but also to all that was said of the ones happily playing about (Awona 1971: 87).

Jean Maurice Noah and others have written about the nature of bikutsi being born of a phallocratic society, one that relegated women an extremely marginal status. According to Noah, Beti women were forced to create a space in which to have a voice, "a vengeance consciously exercised by the women against the men" (Noah 2002: 25). And Beti historian Laburthe-Tolra has added that the development of bikutsi has much to say about the social organization of Beti society, where men monopolize speech (Laburthe-Tolra 1981).

Our earliest knowledge of bikutsi marks it as an unaccompanied women’s song form in the Beti villages of central and south Cameroon. It served the women’s private spaces, and the lyrics gave voice to the frustrations and criticisms, as well as the hopes and advice that could be passed from generation to next (Mbala 1985, Mbia 1992, Ngumu 1976, Menguele 1979, Ghonda 1988).

It is said that good bikutsi lyrics are smart, picturesque, paradoxical, oblique and suggestive. They are marked by uses of imagery, poetry, and what is called the “hidden style,” as it is often possible to hide ideas or references in Ewondo linguistic codes. It is the musical genre of subversion, feminine dissidence, and has always served a critical and tribunal function (Ndjana 1999).

The development of bikutsi involves the addition of various instrumentation by male musicians, including the nkul drum, a hollowed log capable of one interval, the plucked lyre called mvet that is more often used to accompany histories and poetry, and most importantly, the mendzan xylophone, for which bikutsi is most known today.

Figure 5: The mvet, the most emblematic instrument of Cameroon

Mendzan are portable, gourd-resonated xylophones, with a built-in rail that enables the instrument to be held away from the body of the player who plays while walking, pointing to its processional nature. Mendzan in the Beti region are characteristically played in four member ensembles, one lead (omvek), two

accompaniment (akuda-omv∂k and nyia-mendzan), and bass (endum) (Nugumu 1976: 31-4). These are often accompanied by drums and rattles.

Tuning of the traditional mendzan has been detailed in the work of Cameroonian priest, composer and musicologist Pie-Claude Ngumu, who led the group La Maîtrise des Chanteurs à la Croix D'ebène. Ngumu writes that mendzan tuning reflects the idea of a hierarchical order of tones corresponding with the family social pattern. Tuning the ten-note omv∂k begins at the center of its extended range, or head of the family, and proceeds stepwise in descending order of pitches 1 through 6 (6 being the lowest note). Upper octaves are then found for the lowest three pitches, the wives of male voices 6,5 and 4. A seventh note, esandi (bad luck), is placed between 1 and 6, completing near equiheptatonic tone system (Ngumu 1976: 35-7). The simultaneously struck harmonic basis of this music is mostly thirds and octaves, the thirds being "neutral" at approximately 320-370 cents. According to Ngumu, though, intervals are not fixed and musicians of each ethnic group adjusts the sounds of the instruments according to the specific necessities of their traditional and contemporary music (Ngumu 1976: 65).

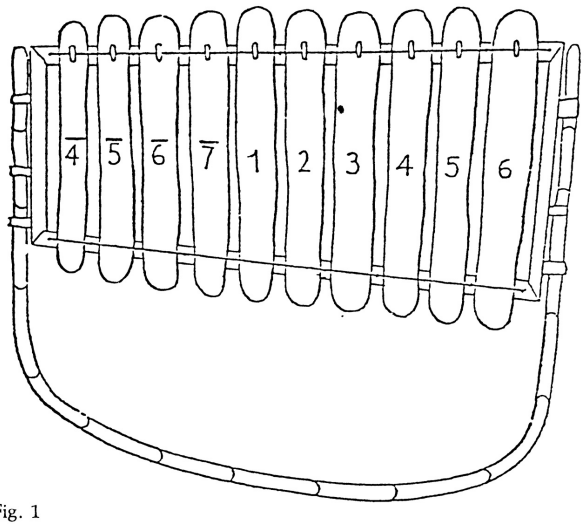


Fig. 1

Figure 6: Mendzan tuning pattern.

Mendzan, and thus bikutsi, have always served traditional functions in Beti village society such as weddings, funeral essanas, so boys' initiation ceremonies and the mevungu womens' ritual. However, in response to labor migration and urbanization throughout the 1950s and 60s, bikutsi adapted first to the orchestras of urban drinking establishments, and finally to electrification, transposing melodic lines from xylophone to guitar. Modern bikutsi belongs to this era, as ensembles such as Richard Band de Zoe Tele, led by Richard Nze, popularized traditional xylophone ensembles throughout Southern Cameroon. They played bikutsi, merengue, rumba and cha cha cha, with texts sung in Beti or French (Kubik, 2000).

The final push came from guitarist Messi Me Nkonda Martin, often called the father of modern bikutsi. Influenced by the rumba guitar sounds from Zaire,

Martin stuffed foam padding into his guitar to deaden the tone and more accurately imitate the sounds of traditional mendzan. The sound was an instant success and his band, Los Comoroes, had a string of hits throughout the 1960s (Fuller 1997: 4).

Figure 7: Mendzan xylophone

The greatest bikutsi group of the popular music era, however, remains Les Têtes Brulées, formed in the early 1980s from previous members of Les Veterans. Têtes Brulées will feature more prominently in this work in later chapters, however it should be noted that their rise to fame in Cameroon, as well as success

abroad and international recording contract are phenomena intricately tied to the political and media environment of Cameroon in the 1980s. Jean-Marie Ahanda, singer, producer and image mastermind, deftly utilized newly available outlets and opportunities at a time when the embracing of Beti tradition as well as the economic realities of Cameroon's masses represented an antithesis to the direction in which the Cameroon's music industry had been headed. Long under the stalled development of the Douala-based makossa style, the music and recording scene in Yaoundé and Douala were stagnant until Paul Biya, a Bulu himself from Sangmelima, took over the presidency in 1982.

Musically, Cameroon had been dominated since independence and throughout the 1960s by the Douala/Sawa-based makossa style. This is a guitar-driven dance music, light on content and heavy on style and ambience, that borrowed musically from Congolese rumba and fashion-wise from Paris, where the majority of makossa has been recorded since the late 1970s. Makossa reflected nothing if not the cosmopolitan, and indeed outward-looking nature of some African music, yet was simultaneously a threat to no one locally, especially the government.

Makossa's greatest proponent outside of Cameroon is Manu Dibango, whose 1972 hit "Soul Makossa" put Cameroonian music on the map internationally, and African music on the charts in the United States for the first time. Ironically, Dibango has always asserted himself as a victim of the lack of imagination and creativity in Cameroon. He was shunned musically until proven a

hit overseas, and later was given very little support in his attempts to establish government-sponsored music and arts programs, and a national orchestra. However, even in absentia, he was seen fit to take over the directorship of the Cameroon Music Corporation from his base in Brussels in 2002.

It was between the dancehall slick makossa and Congolese soukous on one side, and the more traditionally-based bands that were often characterized by village instruments and exoticized local dress on the other, that Les Têtes Brulées would stake its claim.

A Cargo Cult for the 21st Century

What comes at the end of media restriction? Is cultism a creative response to the neuroses and anxiety of modernization? Or is it closer to the emancipatory promise of cargo in the new form of media?

In noting the importance that imagination plays in the quotidian mental work of people in the post-electronic world, Arjun Appadurai wrote that, although now part of the logic of ordinary life, this type of thinking "has precedents in the great revolutions, cargo cults, and messianic movements of other times, in which forceful leaders implanted their visions into social life, thus creating powerful movements for social change" (Appadurai 1996: 5).

Cargo cults proper are movements arising from the impact of modern technology on developing cultures. Thus, if Western trade goods (or cargo) typify prosperity, then traditional cultures unable to adopt Western culture are weakened by their influx. Prophetic leaders then promise special cargoes of European goods, and devise the enactment of special rituals to drive foreigners away and concurrently speed delivery of the awaited cargo. In most cases, the cargo is never associated with the Western economic system that produces it, and ultimately the cult cannot understand why it does not arise.

It might be said that cargo cult mentality, on one hand, informs social movements that help people cope with problem of culture contact and change. On the other, however, it is the misapplication of indigenous cultural, magical or religious notions to a Western rational, economic or technological order. If both magic and technology aim at presencing or concealing truth and power respectively, the difference of accounts rest on how various types of truth and legitimacy are assigned to Western versus Other.

It would seem that the essence of cargo cultism is in the relationship between genuine desire and ineffective practice, or between rational ends and irrational means. However Appadurai suggests that though often ordered in indigenous patterns, "the ritual practice of cargo cults is in many cases no less than a massive effort to mime those European social forms that seemed most conducive to the production of European goods." In a kind of reverse fetishism, what is replicated is what is seen as the most potent of European social and

linguistic forms in an effort to increase the likelihood of the arrival of European commodities (Appadurai 1986: 52).

Cargo cult mentality is a redemptive process by which the social and moral order may be rebuilt after the expressed dissatisfaction with current cultural conditions. Manu Dibango, Cameroon's most well-known musician, once spoke of the over-reliance that many Cameroonians exhibit on the concept of ancestors, and the assumption that Europe will eventually pay the local debt, both figuratively and literally (Dibango 1994). And Bayart wrote " the celebration of the cargo cult of the postcolonial State, which is by definition in-egalitarian, affords the dominant actors the means of vociferously defending their material interests whilst at the same time laying claim to the highest ideals of development and public order" (Bayart 1993: 238). In this case, the cargo is no longer the goods coming off planes, but media images that make up the local imaginary.

I spent an afternoon with the landlord's brother. He was 27, stylish and unemployed. He lived in a shed in back of the main house, and clearly knew the score. We spent the majority of the afternoon at his favorite pastime, perusing a European airline shopping catalog, maybe 2 inches thick, full of electronics, fancy liquors and perfume, and presumably at the duty-free of his dreams. He argued the merits of one expensive watch over another, asked my preferences in scotches, and kitted himself out in Gucci and Versace. While at the same time both of us knowing full well he might never be able to afford a real pair of Levi's to replace his Chinese knockoffs (Elvi's). Which made me wonder…the next day we

wandered into the quartier Internet boutique, and I sat down with my ticket, opened a browser, and went straight to the browser history. There it was: Puma, Nike, Fubu, Sean Jean, Porsche, Ferrari, Sony, Apple.

Thus, it is possible that cult hysteria is not neurotic reaction to disturbed society, but rather a positive process that plays a crucial role in situations of rapid change. That is, rather than just the negative reaction of being unable to cope with unwanted change, or effecting that change yourself, we might see this move as a way of effecting radical change in a moral and societally valuable way. Ecstatic cults can be associated with stress and change because they inspire and validate innovation. And in cases of failure, allow for the safe return of the old order with a minimum of social guilt and tension (Stephen 1977: 6). Not unlike the concept of competing discourse, or field of opinion in questioning Bourdieu's notion of doxa and habitus, a cargo cult can provide swift, efficient means of changing the ideological system to cope with change, to break with the past and move rapidly from one belief system to a new one, or to generate new moral orders and belief systems which are not imposed from the top down, but arise out of dreams and creative energies of villagers themselves (Bourdieu 1977: 168).

Ultimately, in terms of Africa, and especially of Cameroon, one very common extension of the term targets misguided or abortive attempts to develop Third World economies. Postwar faith in modernization and international development having failed, what once looked like global strategy now has the image of cargo cult. As Lindstrom writes, "Dreams of Third World economic

development are as substantial as the arrival of ghostly white cargo ships" (Lindstrom 1993: 187). Indeed, in Cameroon, it has been noted that the underlying mechanisms of cargo cults are to be found in development processes. "The picture which emerges from the discourse of Cameroon institutional representatives in this study is closely akin to the prayers made in the cargo cult, going so far in one case to inform European donors of their 'prayful interest for greater things to come'" (Langley 1986: 30).

Back to Dibango, who wrote, "I once saw our real mother lode, our real cash crop, in creativity…creativity is our only path to health—making way for the imagination" (Dibango 1994). It seems that, from his unique vantage point, Dibango saw the desire for cargo, and knew that in the postmodern era, it would not come from ghost ships or airplanes, but media—in the form of images. "The image," Maffesoli wrote, "is culture. The image makes culture" (Maffesoli 1996: 100).

But what will people pin to their own concrete awakenings? Benjamin advocated this notion in the idea of finding the transgressive element in image proliferation. For Benjamin, there is the possibility of a redemptive moment in images, and in the imagination it takes to navigate them. Multiple images, then, have the ability to reveal their own inner contradictions, to fight rationality, and, opposed to classical Marxism, are not false consciousness. He writes that "ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectic image therefore a dream

image. Such an image is presented by the pure commodity" (Benjamin 1978: 157). Similarly, a reproduction is not merely a copy of an original, or false, for the act of copying, or the principle of reproduction, is built into the original work. Thus, it is in the proccessural, in the negotiation of daily life, in the choices made and not made.

Perhaps the final word here belongs to those who recognize these possibilities, those who will make up the collectives, the unions, the social and civil society, and will not be defined by the rubrics of nationalism or development.

Chapter Two is a case study, or rather a dialogue between the contemporary Les Têtes Brulées (my narration) and the formation of the original band (producer Jean-Marie Ahanda's journal and personal reflections). The event is a band reunion of sorts, acted out on the political stage of America's Fourth of July celebration at the Ambassador's residence. As I have written elsewhere (Rathnaw 2005), LTB made their name by holding a mirror up to normative preconceptions of African music on the continent. Twenty years later, their version of strategic minstrelsy holds as much power as ever, and the results are equally as spectacular.

Chapter three is a moral crisis that plays itself out in the media. Here I analyze the re-emergence of women bikutsi stars, and the accompanying crisis of morality that ensued in the media. Even as bikutsi was once the sole purvey of women, the combination of technology, media and foreign influence allows them

to take a leading role in a very different public look and sound. At the same time, it demonstrates Mbembe's aesthetics of vulgarity by sharing in the lecher and obscenity of the phallocratic power elite.

Chapter four is the story of the band Macase, their rise, fall and rise again, and the resulting music collective Culture Mboa Collectif. Using technology to form what I find to be elective communities, it shows one possible way forward from the stifling political and moral climate that has been contributing to the decline of the music industry in Cameroon. It also may point to a future that makes room for collectives oriented toward the rational pursuit of ends collectively arrived at.

Finally, in chapter five, I examine the role of the royalties society, the now-failed CMC under the direction of Manu Dibango and the sham politics of re-instituting the organization. I contrast that with the Unites States Government's inauguration of the promising-in-theory African Media Federation in Douala the same year. The failure of both governments' ability to engender a culture of organization without fear of the preternatural accumulation of power and wealth presents a stark and startling similarity.

As an ethnographic study of bikutsi practice and local consumption, along with radio, television and newspaper, and the government interaction that ties it all together, this work significantly increases our knowledge of a major geographical area on the African musical map. It also deepens our understanding of the interaction of media, politics and popular culture in Africa at large in a way

that seriously, and for the first time, draws on detailed, media production–oriented, empirical work.

Finally, on the ground level, I tried to pay close attention to what Cameroonians refer to as "radio trottoir," or sidewalk radio, which, as Jean-François Bayart has written, "is the murmur of social practices which tirelessly fashion, deform and undermine the institutions and ideologies created by the highest of the high" (Bayart 1993). Any serious study of culture in Cameroon must pay attention to this popular institution, which is both highly informative as it is entertaining, if not always so truthful.

Everyone, it seems, is looking for transparency, which always comes back to radio trottoir, the circulation of sensational rumors by unofficial sources. Because of censorship, journalists have restricted opportunities for creativity. Since explanations are not usually given in response to national issues, information must be fabricated as a means of satisfying the curiosity of the population. Though these stories are rarely unfounded, and most contain more than a germ of truth, facts are usually inflated above their true proportions. So as President Biya cautions that truth comes from above while untruth circulates from below, radio trottoir continues to gain ground as a popular institution.

If we take Jürgen Habermas's definition of the public sphere as that realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed, then we can see rumor, or radio trottoir as a popular form of knowledge production in Cameroon. Habermas writes that a portion of the public sphere

comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. "Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion--that is, with guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions--about matters of general interest" (Habermas 1964: 49). Of course, in Cameroon, there is no guarantee of such freedoms but in social life. Here, rumor belongs to the prevalence of non-traditional forms of communication and information transmission located primarily in the domain of orality and popular culture. Perhaps it is the only effective form of communication in an environment in which official discourse is the privileged domain of a hegemonic, centralized and monolithic government.

According to Nyamnjoh, radio trottoir constitutes a direct consequence of censorship and continues to develop, especially given that local media outlets have no credibility. It serves as an indicator of latent conflicts and of the global social dynamic. Radio trottoir is a vague form of counter-power. "Through rumor, the little people can bring down to their level the men in power, sometimes caricaturing them, often parodying them" (Nyamnjoh 2002: 175). Of course, to believe in stories without truth makes sense also in the framework of witchcraft, where one subscribes to a model of reality that consists of the visible as well as the invisible.

An example of a most bizarre act of rumor writ large occurred in February of 2006, when an independent newspaper in Yaoundé printed the infamous list of

50--alleged homosexuals that included the names of high-ranking government officials, wealthy businessmen, entertainment stars and footballers. In a country where such "deviant behavior" is outlawed, it was all anyone could talk about for days.

Figure 8: the list of 50.

The issue went into several print runs, and boys were selling photocopied lists on the street. Eventually, Communications Minister Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo--whose

name appeared on the list as well--had enough and had the publisher Jean Pierre Belina jailed.

I found this project to be an exhilarating, if not always wholly organized venture. Waking up in the morning to decide if work that day involved radio stations, television studios, newspaper beats or musical performances in the cabarets made for a rich and rewarding, and never dull fieldwork experience. My hope is that that level of engagement and excitement comes through in the following chapters. Ultimately, I hope that this study will shed light on other media processes in other countries where the aims of the government, the people and the various mediations between them are not always without tensions.

Chapter Two

Les Têtes Brulées Redux: Strategic Minstrelsy Goes Patriotic

The real complexity in bikutsi is in the free. You have to be free in your mind. Completely free.

--Steve Ndzana, from my first lesson on how to play bikutsi

Manu Dibango, with his 1972 hit "Soul Makossa," his tours with the salsa mainstay Fania All-Stars, and the successful lawsuit against Michael Jackson certainly has to be considered Cameroon's most visible international star. But as he's spent his entire career between Paris and Brussels, he cannot make that claim inside his own country. That distinction belongs to the Les Têtes Brulées, who have been often been described to me as Cameroon's Beatles. Since inventing themselves at the Chacal Bar in Yaoundé in the early 1980s, exploding over the newly-inaugurated CRTV in 1987, and upstaging zouk supergroup Kassav at Stade Ahidjo, Têtes Brulées rise to stardom at home and abroad has sounded distinct resonances in the political spectrum as well as the media realm.

It can't be considered coincidence that contemporary bikusti performance so quickly overtook the mainstream preference for makossa after Paul Biya took

presidential office in 1982. As a Bulu Beti from Sangmelima in the south of Cameroon, Biya was considered a great fan of bikutsi, and his second wife Chantal become an avid patron of the arts. Concurrently, the first years of television broadcasting exposed the entire urban population to new and rising bikutsi stars, and the installation of a recording studio at the CRTV ensured that plenty of material was available for the buying public.

However, I have written elsewhere that Tête Brulées stood apart from most other groups for their ability to quickly apprehend the possibilities of new technology, and utilize them in way that made bikutsi relevant for more than solely women's functions, or bawdy sex songs. They successfully negotiate the very same technologies of Western modernism while carefully constructing an identity situated firmly in a Black modernism, arguably a stage withheld from Africans in the European historical arc from Victorian colonialism to post-modernity (Rathnaw 2002).

Les Têtes Brulées has first to be understood as a media project. The band was originally formed by Jean-Marie Ahanda, a former art and advertising student and then entertainment journalist for the state-sponsored *Cameroon Tribune*. Less a musician and more a media craftsmen, Ahanda realized the potential in bikutsi's traditional strengths and recognized the public void that makossa was failing to fill. In an interview he stated that he could challenge public perceptions with the proper promotion and production, "a unique image and a sound that was innovative yet rooted in Beti tradition (Fuller 1997: 5).

Ahanda collected a group of accomplished musicians, including Congolese-style rumba guitarist Theodore "Zanzibar" Epeme, and Les Têtes nurtured their uniquely accelerated, guitar-driven brand of bikutsi at the Chacal Bar in Yaoundé. However, as unique as their sound may have been in the unchallenging music scene that had hold of Cameroon, it became increasingly apparent that music was the least of levels on which their brand of bikutsi was playing.

The image of Les Têtes Brulées is their initial entrée:

> They look like a gang of science-fiction urban warriors with their shaved heads, painted bodies, cutaway clothes, designer sunglasses and skateboard body armour. Their hybrid music is as wild and futuristic as their image…a mix of street credibility and bush culture (Ewans 1992: 123).

> This brash, body-painted quintet has carved a punkish niche for itself in Cameroon's pop scene as a self consciously anarchic alternative (Jackson 1997).

> The name means the hot heads, or the burnt heads, but implies, more pointedly, the mind-blown. They are truly hard to miss in a crowd. The five-man line-up sports neatly torn t-shirts, elaborate dots-and-bars body paint over most of their skin, retro mirror shades, Afro mohawks, huge sneakers, and trademark Day-Glo book bags that they wear through their electrifying stage shows (Billboard 1991: 72).

What is most striking about Les Têtes Brulées is not their music, which, although a highly original style of central African pop, nevertheless follows many of the paradigms of African popular music, such as substituting guitars for indigenous instruments and playing over traditional dance rhythms. Rather it is

their appearance, and how, under a state-censored media, they were able to negotiate not only local media and government restriction, but also a global market, which, at the time, had very distinct notions of what African musicians looked and sounded like.

Charles Fuller, in his "History of Bikutsi in Cameroon," offers this analysis of band's image:

> With shaved heads and body painting representing scarification from traditional Beti ceremonies, the group immediately sent out an alternative message to the makossa-accustomed public. The addition of a variety of colors to the body painting implied a further ironic tinge that the Têtes had to add color to their already "colored" skin. The group sported torn tee-shirts to represent the real economic situation of their country, rather than the elite escapist image that other musicians presented. Finally, the group wore backpacks during their performance as an homage to the Beti women who traditionally tied babies onto their backs and danced bikutsi. Thus the embracing of Beti tradition, as well as the economic realities of Cameroon's masses, represented an antithesis to the direction that the music industry had been headed minutes before Les Têtes Brulées had appeared on CRTV (Fuller 1997: 6).

While this is certainly an adept reading at a local level, I would move beyond this, onto the national and transnational stage. It is apparent that Ahanda was consciously aware of the decisions he made in constructing the band, from the sound to the look to the promotion. In 1987, only two years after music videos on CRTV, Cameroon's public had become over-accustomed to the bourgeois chic and over-produced style presented in makossa videos. Les Têtes Brulées was founded in part as a reaction against this popularly projected image,

and partly as a way of breaking both the hold of local restriction and global expectation.

With these various strategies, Ahanda was able to minstrelize the popular image while simultaneously creating, and submitting to, its cargo cult quality. Maffesoli expresses this perfectly when he writes that:

> the image has always been a place of refuge, a way of experiencing dissidence, the expression of that utopia, always renewed, that is the quest for a perfect society or, at the very least, for a society in which the weight of constraint and necessity would be less heavy. Whence come the dreams, desires, and fantasies that it never ceases to arouse, and which every kind of power—ecclesiastical, political, intellectual—has always mistrusted. The 'beautiful escape' is inscribed at the very heart of the image; it always refers back to an elsewhere supposedly better, that one may live in a major key in moments of revolt, revolution, or important change (Maffesoli 1996: 121).

Understanding the importance of the visual impact of their message, Les Têtes Brulées debut on CRTV's music video program TelePodium, which was immediately followed by a large *Tribune* pictorial entitled "Decouvrons Les Têtes Brulées." Under the headline "TelePodium on fire with Les Têtes Brulées, the article stated that "Elvis had encountered the new Têtes Brulées," and it had proved to be an enchanting and knowledgeable voyage toward a new bikutsi (Tribune 1987: 18). As well, since he was a journalist for the *Cameroun Tribune*, it was no coincidence that the *Tribune*, a state-run paper, was responsible for a majority of their national press, including pieces he often wrote. Between July

1987 and December 1989, no less than 41 features appeared in the *Tribune*, some penned by Ahanda, and others in the format of an Ahanda interview.
Having lived, written and recorded in Paris, he was no stranger to the international music market. Musically, Ahanda in interview has said, "I wanted to present musicians living in Cameroon, playing only bikutsi—the sort of music people don't want, but that the musicians decide to play anyway and succeed" (Fuller 1997: 6).

However, as Eric Lott has pointed out in his work on minstrelsy, there is no easy dialectic between mass cultural domination, that is, the incorporation of black culture fashioned to racist uses, and the celebration of an authentic people's culture, the dissemination of black arts with potentially liberating results (Lott 1995: 17).

If the purpose of the minstrel mask is as much to maintain control over a potentially subversive act as to ridicule it, then in what Lott calls the "mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation," it might be more productive to see Les Têtes Brulées as mastering the space of instability or contradiction in the form itself. In terms of the transnational music industry, the media, and issues such as the commodification of black bodies, white or black pleasure, and the culture industry at large, Les Têtes Brulées offer self-mockery as well as subversion, blackness as well as racial domination, commodification as well as contestation. As Lott rightly points out, "minstrelsy makes blackness flicker on

and off so as to simultaneously produce and disintegrate the body" (Lott 1995: 117).

Updating the Past

The following section is a dual narrative of sorts spliced together from my recollections of a reunion show I was able to arrange for Les Têtes Brulées, and from snippets of Jean-Marie Ahanda's journal twenty years previous. Watching the band go through their motions, and discovering which of their certain tactics remained and were applied to what was an unusual circumstance turned out to be enlightening and intriguing as well as entertaining.

The Cultural Affairs officer called me one day in June. I was an oddity to those at the American embassy, being the only American, as they said, to have chosen to be in Cameroon. Yet there I was, and a music guy as well. "You know a lot of musicians. Do you think you can put a band together for the Ambassador's 4th of July party? Maybe some rock, country and a little jazz and blues?" I asked about the party. Every dignitary, diplomat, government official and VIP in the

country would be there, along with the small handful of Americans. “Lots of Cameroonians?” I asked. Yes. “Press?” Of course. “You know,” I said, “they actually have bands in this country. Good ones. I’m working with one. They used to be very famous. I bet it would make a whole lot of people very happy to see them in such a prominent gig…very politic…you guys would be heroes…”

> *All had started for me on my return to Cameroon, precisely to Yaoundé, on February, the year 1979. Mr. Giscard d’Estaing, the President of the French Republic, had just visited the country and everywhere it smelled fresh from the co-operation, with the still fresh flags, clean and remade streets, etc… As naïve as I was then, I had abandoned all my records and an important part of my books in France, thinking that Cameroon, following a normal evolution, would have been all that interested me then. I sailed without illusion into a fully forged National Unity, promising for the pioneers of the new-look Makossa. Nothing at this time led me to presume the coming arrival of bikutsi. The Cameroonian tradition was dying out in the years of struggle for independence, when the rare production houses had disappeared quickly because of violence, the independence fighters, and the consequent reaction of the colonizers (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 9: Jean Marie Ahanda, shortly after returning from France
Courtesy of JMA

And that's how I put the band back together. Completely out of self-interest, of course. I would finally get my shot to see and hear them live, and if I had to be honest, I was a fan. Cameroon was indeed the perfect country in which to live and work (though my initial infatuation died the same day the gendarmes started shooting and raping the striking university students at Yaoundé I. And the odd thing was no one seemed to care.). But it was the music that initially caught my attention, and it still had it. I had the records, I spent 2 years tracking down

their Clare Denis-directed documentary entitled *Man No Run* (I had the only copy in the country as it turned out), and I rehearsed my amateur afro pop band until they could struggle their way through *Essingan*. I was glad the embassy had their band, but delighted I had my backstage pass.

> *Apart from making a bit of money from the instigators of this event, this concert served to decide amongst the three groups who quarreled and fought for the leadership in the town of Yaoundé, and perhaps Cameroon. The stakes were important, because the Hi-Fi did not yet exist, and only the big formations divided the lively market, marriages, and other important events. The big formations of the army and of the Republican Guard were just the point of reforming, since prestigious military bands had existed in the past. Personally, the first grand band that I had seen in my childhood was a military band with more than twenty members, in large uniform, and in my astonishment they performed salsa and Congolese music (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 10: Ahanda, when times were good
Courtesy of JMA

I thought, mistakenly, this would be my coup with Jean-Marie Ahanda, the founder and creative mind of the band. But he wasn't interested. Then, after more badgering, he was interested only in the money, which wasn't near enough (he had asked an outrageous sum). We went back and forth for weeks. His American wife got involved. He didn't need the money and I wasn't sure why he was balking. Of course, at the time, I didn't understand the personnel dramas that had plagued the band for decades. Or the personal strife he had suffered from the press for being implicated in guitarist Zanzibar's death (either witchcraft, or poison, depending on who you believe), and ultimately the break-up of the band

at their peak (jealousy and greed, or course). Finally, when I thought the whole thing would collapse, I walked into his studio one day and he told me they were going to play. Why the change of heart? “It’s for America," he waited and smiled. “We’re all fighting the terrorists.” Okay.

> *Our youth had been influenced by music created by Americans groups such as O' Jays, the Cane and Able, Earth Wind and Fire, Brass Construction, Beatles, Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Alvin Lee, and a quantity of English groups such as Kinks, Spencer Davis Group, and some large groups of Jazz. The Congolese music seemed repetitive to us, populist, turning almost always around adventures met close to a fatal woman. Moreover the titles of the songs were invariably the first names of the women in question. It was the same for the French songs by Johhny Halliday, Richard Antony, Gall France and all the wave of singers present in the magazine "Hello Buddies” (Ahanda 1989).*

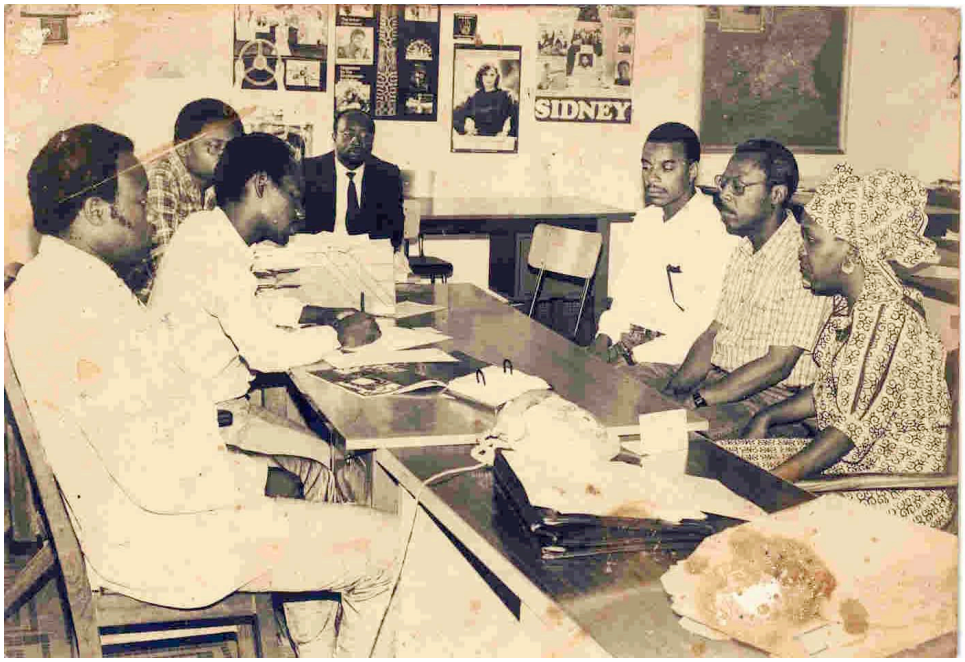


Figure 11: At work at the Tribune
Courtesy of JMA

I hung around the studio for a few days to get an idea of what he had up his sleeve. All kinds of people came and went. Rachelle Tchoungi, an older, well-known but slightly eccentric singer showed up one day. Then a bolt of the red, white and blue “Stars and Stripes Forever" pagne arrived. The Americans had made it especially for the party, and they would all be dressed in custom-made clothes made from it. All the while JM was uncharacteristically quiet with me. The day of the event I showed up to the studio early. He was there with Tunde Ondoua, the current Martiens (the ghosts of LTB) lead guitarist, and I suppose the acting Zanzibar for the night. The were chopping holes in shirts, and of course, the American-designed event cloth, which he had had made into pants. JM smiled while I watched him destroy, and design the fabric. It had begun.

> *With Celeste Allelou, we decided on a new way of dressing Les Têtes Brulées, and he took care of the trousers and whims of t-shirts that I had afterwards to tear up in order to give them their final look. The result was amazing, because Celeste had perfectly realized my idea. I arrived on television the last, well that I did not turn up before so that they might stop me (Ahanda 1989).*

We met up that afternoon for set-up and sound check at the Ambassador’s residence. I felt more comfortable doing musician things, so I helped with sound equipment and drum set-up. I found everything but the bass drum pedal, and asked Afata where it was. As it turned out, it wasn't there, and here’s why: Ahanda felt the gig was too important for ordinary beat-up equipment, so in order to sound good, he borrowed the best drum kit in town. This happened to belong to Steve Ndjana, the owner of Le Petit Tam-Tam cabaret (and himself a great

drummer as well as director of the CRTV orchestra). I suggested we drive over to get the forgotten pedal. “No, we can’t do that,” he said, and left it at that. And then I realized what had happened: great gig, very prestigious, lots of money for a band that doesn’t even play together anymore--and Steve wasn't included in any way. Sure, take my drums, he was thinking. And try to play without a bass pedal.

> *Many musicians, above all those of makossa, thought that I had helped myself in my position at the newspaper for the promotion of my personal affairs, according to the proverb which says that a goat grazes where it is tied up. What they ignored was the initiative of publishing seven pages on the artists in the governmental newspaper. That is necessary for being the leader (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 12: The early Têtes Brulées in Europe
Courtesy of JMA

Back at the studio that evening when all the musicians arrive, it's like the layers of an archeological dig of the band's history. Zanzibar had passed, of course, and too many guitarists had come and gone, but Tunde would play lead. Roger Bekongo had long ago taken the place of original rhythm guitarist Apache Ango, who would no longer have anything to do with Ahanda. Bass player Atebass was an original, but Soul Mangouma, his early replacement had also died, supposedly of AIDS. Afata Andre was one of two original drummers, and also a current member of Atebass's Martiens.

> *Zanzibar informed me that certain musicians had quit, but that the majority were ready to apply my plan of war. Among those who refused to follow this idea were Sala Bekono the singer, Nylon Azeme the drummer, Ndeko the guitarist who spoke none other than Lingala without being Congolese. Those who responded with enthusiasm to this call were: Zanzibar, Atebass, Apache Ango, and Afata, a curious drummer of my acquaintance. There was also the very young Owono who later became the celebrated Gibraltar Drakkus. I had added Owono because we had nobody to occupy the piano that the orchestra of CTV used at the time for play-back. His role was to look like he was playing a part on the piano (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 13: Present day Martiens, Tunde Onduoa and Atebass

Finally, Jean-Marie started opening bottles of paint. I had watched this over and over again in the documentary, and was looking forward to it. The room was quiet, ritualistic; everyone submitting to the brushstrokes with bent heads like a surrealist benediction. It was amazing to me that they had all managed to keep some semblance of a Tête Brulée hair-style going all these years. "Whatever they say, it's best to die with your hair combed," went the old TB motto. It was also an identity, carte blanche around town. Everyone knew them by the shaved hair, and seemed to appreciate the memories it retrieved.

> *At this instant I had understood that I was going to carry out a vision of my painting applied to traditional expression and of the modern or contemporary image on the musical group, but also of metisse inspiration. When the moment came to prepare oneself for television, I sent to look for*

razors, and when they were available, I indicated to each musician which drawing to execute on his skull in order to create an absolutely original hair style, in leaving here and there some tufts of hair that I came afterwards to line with different colors. I pulled geometric motives around the islets, multiplying the effects of illusion. When I painted round the left tufts and on the face with gouache, it realized the change carried out. It did not matter for me if the musicians took hold of the cultural stake of this approach. It was essential that the adventure and the motives pleased them, and the support from the public was guaranteed (Ahanda 1989).

Figure 14: Ahanda painting Tunde

Then a horde of kids came in. Jean's teenage son and his friends, steeped in Hip Hop and Rap, and having no interest in his father's "old" music. We had once spent an entire afternoon debating the merits of Marvin Gaye versus 50 Cent. Jean painted a small rune on each of their faces or foreheads. I looked at

him and he laughed at me (he was doing a lot of that), “Dance troupe,” he explained. At a certain point in my picture and note-taking, and getting in everyone’s way, I realized that I had become the *Validating White* of the documentary. Not that they need validating per se, and certainly not by me. More like I got the feeling that there was always a white guy hanging around, organizing, directing, fawning, exploiting. I couldn’t be sure which, or all. And it was also apparent they were well used to humoring and indulging (suffering?) him. I think I felt myself shrink into the corner a bit.

> *In Paris, I had also met the independent journalist, Frank Tenaille, who I had given my services in order to discuss with him the aspects of the job that I did not understand, parts of the contract, what we vulgarly call the “business.” The more I listened to him tell me of royalties, advances on royalties, past errors of such or such other group, the less I understood what he wanted to say (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 15: Atebass, the author and Tunde

When I thought it was time to go, and excitement was high, everyone sat down for the pre-show warm up ritual. That is, everyone rolled a huge mbanga spliff and smoked out. This was definitely part of the reputation as far as I knew it. And after all these years it hadn't changed. When it was time, I went to go for taxis, but they all laughed and Jean said, "We're taking your car" (Toyota wagon, seats five). Pretty soon I had the entire band, guitars and bass in my car, all painted limbs and polka dots and stars and stripes. I thought of the circus gag car stuffed with clowns, and how this might look piling out at the Residence.

> *The end of this night held some rather unpleasant surprises for me, this by the fault of Lappe, who had decided at the last minute before going up on stage to light a joint. It was in Douala during the high rainy season. It was terribly hot and Pasteur had to my knowledge never smoked a bomb. Suddenly on stage he begged me to lead him to the bathroom because he could not play anymore (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 16: Roger Bekongo took this whole night very seriously

Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance to see the car gag to fruition. Security detail at the residence gate had changed, and apparently they weren't aware that this car full of painted and stoned musicians was expected inside. This is where I finally became of some use, surprising, I think, to everyone. I happened to know that the property next to the Residence belonged to the head of the Cultural Affairs section (my people, I suppose). I also happened to know that

there was an escape tube that ran underneath the shrubbery in that yard, and through to a hidden exit in the Ambassador's yard, in case of terrorist attack or emergency escape. And that is how we arrived at the 4th of July party, me and Les Têtes Brulées, crawling through the escape tunnel and crashing through the bushes into the Residence.

> *Our police officer got out of his car with the bearing of his occupation and found himself face to face with us demanding to see our identity papers and to know the reason for all the disguising at this nocturnal hour. The civil servant was convinced that we came from holding up the service station, disguised as clowns, and that our rushed departure that of an escape with substantial loot (Ahanda 1989).*

Figure 17: Transformation complete

The gig was a touch bizarre from the start. Ahanda made a big deal out of introducing Rachelle, and she opened the proceedings like an avant-jazz ball game. There was a very deconstructed version of "God Bless America," interspersed with snatches of Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," some scat, a couple primal screams, and a little Ewondo chant thrown in for good measure. It was obvious people were confused and a little uncomfortable. Were they being mocked on their own holiday, or was this homage to everything American? The artistry of it was undeniable, however, and the crowd clapped when they were supposed to. Les Têtes Brulées then opened their set, but I knew immediately they were flat, perhaps a little un-energized. Musicians who smoke, in my experience, are usually not as good as they think they are. Still, ripped up stars and stripes and all, it was a spectacle, and the crowd ate it up—the Americans for the novelty of it, the Cameroonians because it was their music and their musical heroes.

> *When the first images of our recordings took place, it was not only a total surprise, but also a generalized delirium and a reversal of the hierarchy of artists and genres. It was the birth of bikutsimania, which had to dishevel a certain number of folds already taken on television and in society. The press had seen the event in delirious terms, taking back the term of the martiens, which spread immediately everywhere the Cameroonian television was visible. Cameroon Tribune had devoted no less than seven pages to those that it had called the musketeers of Cameroonian and bikutsi music. This had never happed before (Ahanda 1989).*

In the middle of the set, the band broke down into a funk groove, and out came the dancers. JM had orchestrated this thing to the hilt. They robot-ed,

locked, popped, and hip-hopped their way around dance floor/tennis courts for a while and ran off. Hip-hop and rap may yet contain the ethos of American gangster, but it is undeniably the defacto soundtrack of Africa in this decade. Even African pop styles such as hiplife in Ghana and coupé décalé in Côte d'Ivoire are incorporating its elements and visual style.

> *In Paris, we missed originality completely. In the Zulu Gang for example, our producers at AB productions had urged us to record disco music, and to pretend to be African-Americans to gain the mobility like stars such as Boney M, or Donna Summer and C Jerome. The music that we had to make was to have an American accent, with clacking choppers, and the American manner of singing. We all had a remote relationship with our music of origin. Apart from the repertoire known by the Cameroonian bands of Manu Dibango, and some Zaireans such as the Large Men of the Maquis, our experiment with African music was limited (Ahanda 1989).*

Finally, they broke out "Essingan," and conjured enough energy to make it exciting. This wasn't the gig I had been looking forward to, however, and I don't think the band was all that into the venue or the crowd. Yet I knew it was going the way JM had planned it, and he was having his fun anyway. Afterward we milled around for a bit, until the entire American crowd took to the tennis courts, resplendent in their matching print cloth, for a giant two-stepping exhibition. We went back to the studio.

> *Playing music with Zanzibar had you no matter what. After working through my songs we did the final version of "Essingan," and then we prospected even more deeply in the repertoire of the mvet. During this time Zanzibar had already composed "Nadege". This means he already put himself to the service of Bikutsi exclusively and started to reduce the*

songs based on rumba. He multiplied all that flowed to him once the tap was opened (Ahanda 1989).

Figure 18: Two-stepping in Yaoundé

We're back at the studio and there is a veritable crowd now, and people are starting to come to life. Still painted and dressed, and nowhere to go. Or so I thought. Back in the cars and we head to Boi d'Ebene, the swankiest cabaret in town. The place is packed, and there is a band onstage, but when LTB walks through the front door, the house erupts. They immediately take the stage, it's hot, it's crowded, it's loud, but people are thrilled as the band spends the next hour tearing the house down. And they finished with an "Essingan" that would have

made Zanzi proud. Long day, long night, but I finally got what I came for. And I thought maybe this was the point of it all for them as well.

> *In the bar, it was a party. Seated in the new chairs from the studios of the Chacal's patron carpenter, the spectators applauded at all breaks in the show. All sorts of night scenes were flourishing around the interior of Chacal bar. At the exterior, on the grounds managed by the patron, appeared the sellers of grilled meat and of cigarettes. A fat Eton woman distributed kolas. Bitter kolas, the "starters", and all sorts of spices and aphrodisiacs such as the kola from the lions and caterpillars, and I passed it. A regular client of these frenzied saturnalias , she probably never sold as much of the rubbish in her life. For those of us in this adventure, things were going at a good pace (Ahanda 1989).*

A few days later I drop by the studio to say hello. JM has resumed his place on the couch, project over, holding court to his cronies. I tell him I have a video of the gig at the residence, and I'd be happy to dub him a DVD. "Ha!" he laughed. "What for?"

**Radio Trottoir says: the American ambassador's grounds were terraced out over a large estate. A friend (of a friend) was (apparently) standing behind the French ambassador, who was standing up top, surveying the scene with dismay. Hundreds of guests enjoying the tropical gardens, scattered bars and buffets, exciting music. Everything lavish and in excess, perfect. Next to him stood a high-ranking Cameroonian, obviously familiar with the ambassador, and noting the success of the evening, and the zeitgeist of French futility. [In fact, it was palpable. Africans were still reeling in the wake of the Paris rioting of 2005. Gross mismanagement and the attitude toward their immigrants was felt like a

slap in the face.] The U.S. had opened its grand new embassy on the golf course, and tonight had won the great publicity war. They had successfully staged the reunion of Les Têtes Brulées, truly Cameroon's favorite sons (Dibango had left, after all). Tomorrow the papers would be in love with the event, the Fourth of July, and America. The Cameroonian turned to the Ambassador and smiled, "Don't worry. You still have cheese."

Chapter Three

The Eroticization of Bikutsi:

Reclaiming Female Space Through Popular Music and Media

Eroticism is a disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question.

--Georges Bataille

Cameroon's relationship with bikutsi contains a paradox made apparent to me immediately upon my arrival in the country, and remained a central theme throughout my time there. My first few nights in Yaoundé were spent in the Faculté de Theologie Protestante, a small seminary compound that rented rooms with a common lounge and kitchen. The building was overseen by a housekeeper/cook who eyed me with curiosity the whole of the first morning as I assembled my notes and plan of action. Finally, she overcame her polite silence to approach, and ask about my mission in Cameroon. "I study bikutsi," I answered, what I thought was innocently enough. She looked at me skeptically, then leaned in, almost conspiratorially. She whispered, "The bikutsi is everywhere." And then she stood up and with obvious disgust remarked, "But it is immoral. Pornography." She walked away and didn't speak to me again.

Three days later I had moved into private lodgings, and again the woman of that house inquired about my work. When I told her about the bikutsi, she took an obvious interest, both delighted and somewhat confused. I took the opportunity to relate the previous story from the Faculté. “Ha!” she scoffed. “That woman is the worst kind of hypocrite. She prays to Jesus in the day, and at night she goes home to dance bikutsi.”

Baudrillard once wrote that we undoubtedly perform the act of obscenity and of pornography, just as others play the game of ideology and bureaucracy (Baudrillard 1987: 34). And Achille Mbembe, writing about Cameroon after independence, put it another way, “in the specific historical context of domination and subjection, the postcolony neither minces nor spares its words” (Mbembe 2001: 108).

In his book, *On the PostColony*, Mbembe defines the 'postcolony' as marked by a liking for the ceremonial and by an exhibitionism that is the more remarkable considering how illusory are the states' practical achievements. Furthermore, power is exercised with a degree of violence and naked exploitation that has its antecedents in previous colonial regimes. People's response is often a ribaldry that revels in the obscene. Mbembe’s singular move here is to invert Bakhtin’s notion of the “Carnivalesque” as belonging to the public space, or as he says, the grotesque and obscene belonging to the unofficial culture.

Distinguishing himself from Bakhtin, Mbembe argues that "the postcolony is made up not of one 'public space' but several, each having its own logic and yet

liable to be entangled with other logics" (Mbembe: 104). As a result, this space often overlaps with that of the elite or governing class in an intimacy, almost a complicity we might say, that turns power and play into performance. Thus, the obscene in Cameroon is an essential characteristic that identifies not only the public sphere of ordinary people, but is also intrinsic to postcolonial regimes of domination. In this sense it helps erect, ratify or deconstruct them.

That the regime allows for the play of vulgarity, revelry and exhibitionism outside the limits set by the party line demonstrates not only the pretense and unreality of its power, but also conveys its total lack of restraint and taste for lecherous living. Mbembe writes, “what gives rise to conflict is not the references to the genitals of those in power, but rather the way individuals, by their laughter, kidnap power and force it to examine its own vulgarity.”

If we accept this reading, Mbembe could have found no more accurate demonstration of his observation than in the contemporary music scene of Cameroon, and in particular of the way the music bikutsi has developed from a women’s village song form to a hotly contested media, moral and cultural debate. The development of a more liberalized media, as well as the influx of foreign media streams has helped foster different, but I might argue complementary, directions in the popular culture of recent years. This has caused somewhat of a dilemma in what has been termed a masculinist or phallocentrically cultured society, as women have come to play a more dominant role in the public voice.

This chapter examines the development of the Cameroonian music bikutsi from traditional song form to media, moral and cultural issue—a site of contestation between local media officials and an increasingly more internationally influenced and liberalized media. I analyze the experience of bikutsi as mediated by politics and external and internal views and consumption. As the Cameroonian media undergoes a process of democratization highly influenced by foreign media, local musicians and video artists become actors in a conflicted and uncertain environment. On the one hand are issues of nation-building and cultural development in the face of dominant foreign media, and on the other, the multitude of images, sounds and forms of popular culture that people attach themselves to in their daily imaginings.

Bikutsi is a style that belongs to the mendzan xylophone tradition, and is linked to the cultural traditions of the Beti people of central Cameroon. However, from the time of its exposure on Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) in the early 1980s, it has developed into a highly eroticized, even pornographic music, sometimes referred to as the "songs of Sodom and Gomorrah." This phenomenon instigated a crisis of cultural and media ethics, resulting in government media bans and television programming such as CRTV's "Deviance," hosted by Ministry of Communications director Gervais Mendo Zé from 2003 to 2005.

I will show that, as Mbembe has alluded to, obscenity as a political choice must be regarded as more than a moral category. Rather it constitutes one modality of power in the postcolony, where, “in a desire for majesty, the masses

join in the madness and clothe themselves in cheap imitations of power. And conversely, power, in a violent quest for grandeur, makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence" (Mbembe: 133). I suggest that the conscious use of technology, the media, and images of the body by performing women, historically excluded from the social administration, constitutes an attempt to re-establish and define a critical voice. Concurrently, it expands the sphere of music performance that allows for a more total saturation, and indeed an overflow, of the usual limits of production and reception.

As an unaccompanied Beti women's song form, bikutsi not only served as a form of accompaniment and entertainment, but also served as commentary and socialization, teaching advice, and demarcated a private space for women to speak in an un-edited manner. Cameroonian cultural scholar Onguene Essono writes, "bikut-si talks about family matters, jealousy, sweet or rough words for our loved ones. It is an anthem to heroes, reconciliation words for enemies or lovers, advice and wishes to children, complaints and critique to elders or traditional authority" (Essono 1996: 52).

Commentary on the institute of marriage, the trials of love, and the problems as head of house made up the vast majority of its themes, and songs often served as counsel and advice for young women getting married. Thus bikutsi was born into a need for creating a private space in a marginalized society, where the women could give expression to what usually amounted to an oblique style of criticism.

Good bikutsi is almost universally judged by its lyric competence. While it is true that themes can be intensely suggestive or downright lewd, the best singers are said to be oblique, poetic, and masters of Ewondo linguistic codes and references (Mbala 1985; Ghonda 1987). At one point in my work I asked Professor Essono to hear his tapes of old singers recorded in the villages for the early radio communitaire project. I assumed these were the kind of singers he was referencing. He said he had something better, and put on a CD that I immediately recognized to be Sally Nyolo, ex-singer of the internationally renowned world music group Zap Mama. I heard synthesizers, fake string pads, a drum machine—all the trappings of a Paris producer. "That's good bikutsi?" I asked incredulously. "Oh, great bikutsi! Just listen to those words! She speaks perfect Ewondo. You don't hear that anymore."

By the same token, Cameroon's media-scape has undergone dynamic and for some, unsettling changes in recent years. The state-controlled audio-visual sector, which has been absolute since its inception in 1986, has gradually loosened to allow private radio since 2000, along with a few fledgling television concerns in the past years. Although in principle, private radio and television has been allowed by law since 1990, as of yet no licenses have been issued, leaving the door open to further intrusion by an always nervous government.

Government declarations since Independence have often stressed the importance of the media in the attainment of cultural, economic and political development objectives. It has always called upon the media to play a leading

role in disseminating information and mobilizing Cameroonians toward self-reliance, autonomy and independence in economic, cultural and political matters. In fact, a 1987 law states that all audio-visual communication must assure an essentially public-interest mission, and carried the motto: Inform, Educate and Entertain. However the mission to inform had to be carried out "in a spirit of responsibility" and in a way that related the facts in an objective manner, permitting everyone to better appreciate their contribution to the common task of nation-building (Nyamnjoh 1990: 111).

At the advent of CRTV, the president was quoted as saying that "television will more appreciably consolidate the basis of our ideals of stringency and moral rectitude, liberalization and democratization, further testifying to our efforts to build our country in unity, freedom and social justice. Information, above everything else, provides the people with the additional moral and intellectual arms in the performance of their tasks" (Nyamnjoh 1989: 36).

However as private radio and television broadcasting has ramped up, media content has strayed as far from the moral and intellectual arms as the government might have assumed. Cameroonians of late have access to DStv satellite packages from South Africa that include M-NET, SuperSport, the various world news agencies from across Europe, and of course, MTV-Africa as well as Trace Music-South Africa. It is interesting to note that Trace blocks out certain late hours out for a program called Adult Trace, which plays alternate soft-core versions of Western urban music videos. Further, Adult Trace becomes straight

hardcore pornography for a number of hours after midnight, a development that has proved quite popular among the young adults.

The CRTV became a more embedded presence into the 1990s, and as more foreign programming became available, bikutsi developed in two distinct directions. Essono noted that while traditional artists from the village have always had a relative degree of freedom of speech in Cameroonian society, it was only after the advent of multiparty democracy and advances in expressive freedom that bikutsi artists began to sing with impunity against the regime in the name of democracy. He noted how themes often came from the view of the poor, or those that remained most loyal to the power. However they always respected a sense of social code, even when speaking of what was unacceptable. This is an excerpt taken from a CRTV Radio Centre show called Bebela Ebug, which programmed older "village-style" bikutsi. It is not a coincidence that bebela ebug is the Ewondo for "truth," or "plain talk."

Nkol-Bikok – *Hope of Revival*

Paul Biya where is the money?
But so where has the money gone?
The macabo sells off, but salt is worth gold.
Manioc sells off while beef is untouchable.
Banana sells bad, the city of Yaoundé is expensive.
Paul Biya where is the money?
But so where has the money gone?
So what have you done with the money?

Father Paul Biya, why do you abandon hope of revival?
We need to live decently father Paul, we need credits.
Hope of revival is falling behind, Why so? Why don't we have credits?

We farm our fields, we harvest peanuts.
Our products do not sell well, and we do not have credits.
So why father do you leave us fall behind.

Paul Biya, anticipating the crisis, fled foolishly,
Thinking we are dying.
Then, if you have any sadness, surrender to your father,
He will save you.
If you happen to need salt, my sister, why cry?
Go to Paul.
If soap, medicines, oil happen to be scarce my sister,
There is your father.
(Essono 1996: 55-57)

This musico-political trajectory was termed "bikutsi engage," and it was critical, voiced by the "small people" and especially by those of his Biya's bulu/beti ethnic group—those whom he was meant to protect.

The second direction was referred to variously as "bikutsi porno," CSM – Cameroon Sex Music, or the Songs of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ndjana 1999). More freedom of expression, coupled with more access to technological modes of exposure, meant women, as well as men, could and did push the basis of bikutsi to new extremes. As well, the local economic collapse of the mid-90s meant even more ammunition was handed to a public ready to turn it back on the increasingly failing government.

Guitarist Messi Martin was a key figure who jumpstarted the rage for non-impressionistic lyrics by using shock words that disrupted the syntax of the song. This proved to be a perfect strategy for radio, and eventually became the standard for television as well. Les Veterans, one of the most popular bands of the modern bikutsi era, penned the song, "Sima Andegele" that included the words:

Qui veut dire, en quelque sorte	*Who wants to say, to some extent*
Le sous-vêtement est genant	*Under-clothing is constricting*
C'est un obstacle	*It is an obstacle*
C'est à l'aube	*At dawn*
Au petit matin	*In the early morning*
Quand chante le coq	*When the cock sings*
Que l'on connait les vrais hommes	*One knows the true man*
Sima Andegele	*Sima Andegele*

This song was played endlessly on the radio, and the live version that played in the nightclubs extended the narrative into far more graphic descriptions and language. This was accompanied by a dance that mimicked the words and acted out various sex acts involved. In fact, it became normal practice to have a thoroughly x-rated version for the nighttime public, and a sedate version for the radio. A further galvanizing moment was provided by the singer Petit-Pays, who included himself fully nude on the cover of one of his cassettes. While people tried to block the sale of this record, the scandal and publicity rocketed him to celebrity.

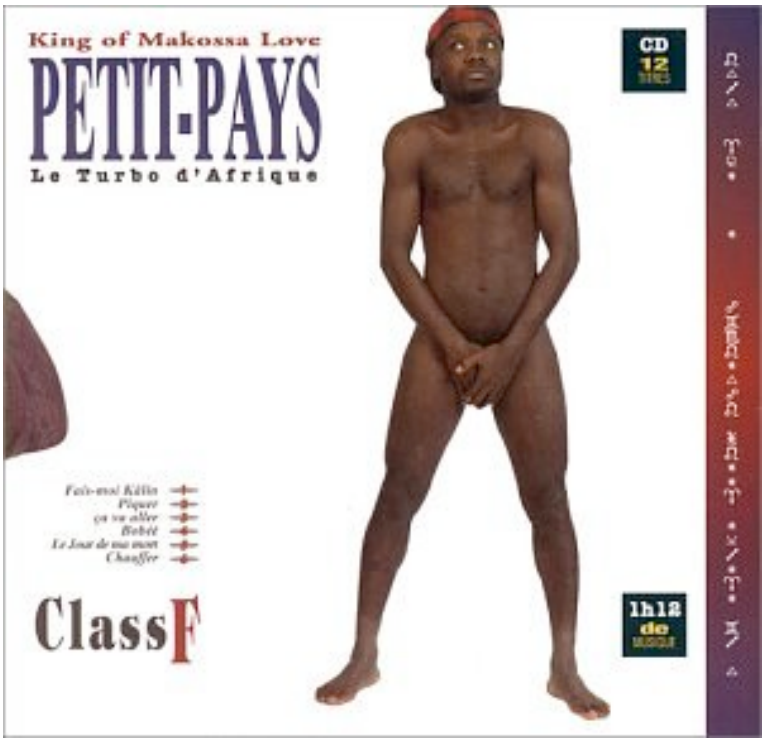


Figure 19: Petit-Pays, King of Makossa Love

I'll focus on perhaps the most famous, and infamous performer of this period, Katheryn Edoa Ngoa, or K-tino, as she is known. Due to her sexually outrageous lyrics and shocking stage performances, the popular press named her "femme du peuple," "mama bonheur" and "mama la joie" and she became a bane to the censors and media officials. Her lyrics were graphic, her dance imitative of various sex acts, and the populous loved her.

Figure 20: Publicity photo

Older women called her immoral, younger women imitated her, and everyone played her records and videos. This is an example of one of her earlier hits, *Action 69*, which plays on the not-so-subtle metaphor of an elevator:

Action 69!
The lift, every male's secret
I like men who are no fools
Those who know how to press my sensitive button
The lift, that's every male's secret
I like a man who is no fool
I like a man who will suck me downstairs
I like a man who will suck me upstairs too
I like men who sin on earth
I like men who sin in heaven too
Even the parish priest loves that

Instead of giving me a private service
He comes home to sin downstairs
And I like the priest who sins upstairs too
And his mass will not be sad as a funeral ceremony
Because every male is a boss
Even in his pajamas
But only when he's strong and big
With his prick as solid as a man's gun
Solid as a church's big candle
And I'll lick him up and down
And then, and only then I'll ask him
To press the button in my lift
(Nkolo 1994: 325)

There is very little of the so-called "hidden style" of language known as the hallmark of good bikutsi. Even the church here is not off limits. However, K-tino became known for pushing the boundaries of taste and decency as her career progressed. One of the most popular records of 2005 in Cameroon was her track entitled *La Queue de Ma Chatte*, which hardly struggles at all behind its metaphor:

La Queue de Ma Chatte

Dédicace à ma chatte et sa queue
Ah, n'est-ce pas?

(Refrain) Aïe, Aïe, Aïe, Fais attention, fais attention
Ne touche pas à ma chatte
Si tu touches à ma chatte je te crée des problèmes
(refrain) Aïe, Aïe, Aïe, Fais attention, fais attention
Ne touche pas à ma chatte.
Docteur Veterinaire, si tu touches à ma chatte
Ne touche pas à sa queue
(refrain)
Chat au féminin on l'appelle la chatte
Chat au masculin on l'appelle le chat Oh oh

(refrain)
Medecin vétérinaire, examine ma chatte
Caresse ma chatte sans toucher à sa queue
(refrain)
Je dis fais attention
Ne touches pas à ma chatte
Quand tu touches à ma chatte, je me mets à pleurer
(refrain)
Chat au masculin, on l'appelle le chat,
Chat au féminin on l'appelle un "galisingowe"
(refrain)
C'est sans commantaires
Si tu touches à ma chatte,
ne touche pas à sa queue.
(refrain)
Quand je vois la souris,
Ça me rappelle un minou,
Quand je vois mon mari
Et j'enlève "l'okale"
Fouda Pierre junior
Méritait le respect.
N'est-ce pas?
Il fait souvent la queue.
Enam Alain tu me rappelles long bon.
Il fait souvent la queue.
Status: y'a Guy. Rouge: c'est aux hommes
Merci pour toutes les queues à la queue-leu-leu
Qui m'ont soutenues,
Hein? N'est-ce pas?
Queues à ce minou,
N'est-ce pas?
Status: fermez. Rouge: ouvrez!
Ne vous en-faîtes pas
Papa a du succès.
À cause de la queue!
Abessolo Roger a fait des merveilles.
Pourquoi? À cause de la queue!
Samais et Gustave respectons à Lome
Pourquoi? À cause de la queue!
André protège le cheval
Surtout que il est le papa des chevaux

(English translation)

I dedicate this song to my pussy and its cock
AAAH, wouldn't you say?

(Refrain) Aie, aie, aie, Do beware,
do not touch my pussy
If you touch my pussy, I'll be giving you trouble.
(refrain) Aie, aie, aie, Do beware,
do not touch my pussy
Dr. Veterinarian, if you touch my pussy
Do not touch his cock
(refrain)
A female is a pussy
A male is a cat Oh oh
(refrain)
Dr. Veterinarian, check out my pussy,
Pet my pussy, without touching his cock
(refrain)
I say, do beware!
Do not touch my pussy,
When you touch my pussy, I start to cry.
(refrain)
A male cat is a cat,
A female cat is a "galsingowe"
(refrain)
No comments needed.
If you touch my pussy,
Do not touch his cock.
(refrain)
When I see the mouse,
I remember the kitty.
When I see my husband,
I take off the "okale".
Fouda Pierre Junior,
Deserved respect.
Didn't he?
He can't wait to come in.
Enam Alain, I remember you long and good.
He can't wait to come in.
Status: Guy is here. Red: time for the men.
Thanks for the queuing cocks,
Who have sustained me.
What? Didn't they?

Cocks to this pussy,
Aren't they?
Status: closed. Red: Open!
Do not worry,
Daddy made it.
Because of his cock!
Abessolo Roger did wonders.
Why? Because of his cock!
Samais and Gustave are respected in Lomé
Why? Because of their cock!
André protects the horse
Especially because he fathered them.

Of course, by adding the "t-e" to the end of the French "chat", K-tino effectively changes "cat" to the slang for female genitalia. And the "tail" then belongs to the willing male. Female singers all over Cameroon love to perform this, as it gives them the opportunity to cavort with male patrons and elicit attention in the way of cash tips, or *gumbo*.

In emphasizing the importance on local linguistic codes, and also the ability of patrons to read between the lines of intended lyrics, I include a translation of the same song by a Cameroonian associate. The impression one gets is much harder, somewhat more sexual or even pornographic in nature.

Laalaaalaaa
Meeoowww

This song is an homage to all the dicks I am fucking!
AAAh! is not it right?
(Ewondo)
Zim kam zoo woo!
Gue me sim ga zoo woo
Oh Wah! (Oh Yes!)

(Refrain)
Aie Aie Aie Do not finger my Godamn Pussy!
I am telling you be afraid, do not try to finger my pussy!
It smells like real dicks, you better believe it!
(Refrain)
Aie Aie Aie Don't you dare finger my Godamn Pussy!
You fucking Veterinarian doctor! What do you fucking know?
If you dare finger my pussy, the smell of real dicks will fuck you up!
Thus, be afraid of my pussy, if you try to finger my pussy,
I am warning you, the smell of real dicks will fuck you up!
(Refrain)
Miaou!
(Ewondo)
Ah! Tonton Ambroise Voundi etc...
Pussies are made to be fucked by real cocks!
(Refrain)
You fucking vet. Doctor examine my pussy, do not try to smell the dicks!
It will fuck you up!
(Refrain)
Miaou (orgasm scream)
I am telling Doctor, be afraid of my pussy,
do not try to smell my pussy,
I am warning you, it smells like real cocks!
It’s all about a hard cock and fucking!
(Refrain)
I do not have to add anything else, forget about fingering my pussy!
Aladji Toure's big daddy
(Ewondo)
I do not know why mice remind me of fucking
That's why, every time my man shows up, I am reading to fuck!
(Refrain)
Fucking is so great!
Fouda Pierre's big cock is so great
Enam Alain what a great fuck!
Thanks for all the cocks!
Thanks for all the cocks that keep me going!
Mendouga Bertrand, daddy knows how to do it, isn't he?
Abessolo Roger, you know how to work it
Let's give a shot to Sama Gustave
Andre, fucking horse's dick, supreme horse's dick! Isn’t he?

This is often the tenor of the imagery I would get by having an Ewondo speaker interpret lyrics for me at performances. There is an understanding of listening beyond the level of spoken lyric in live performance, where very little is ever deemed inappropriate.

The very first time I heard *Ma Chatte* was at a very stylish cabaret in Douala. I watched a woman in a black sequined cocktail dress and stiletto heals perform the number in front of a well-heeled crowd and their cocktails. Imagine my surprise when she danced by our table and meowed while petting her crotch. At the opposite end of the spectrum, I witnessed a number of different versions of the same song in karaoke bars throughout Yaoundé. The participants in Cameroonian karaoke clubs act out the choreography of popular videos to recorded playback rather than actually singing the vocals. This gives the performer of *Ma Chatte* the chance to climb on tables or men's laps, acting out various sex acts and in various states of dress. Shocking perhaps, and humorous, but always a crowd favorite.

Figures 21-22: Screen capture from video

This new bikutsi was denounced in various presses as immoral and in violation of the norms of decency. One panicked journalist wrote, "Cameroon has exhibited a looseness of morals unprecedented. The debauchery and the sexual perversions are of the most immoral, and affect everyone. Sex, of the most vulgar

manner, is more and more present in the media and the public, marked by eccentric, indecent clothing intended to provoke sensual pleasure, nudity, and sensuality."

If K-tino has gained a reputation as the most bawdy or pornographic singer in Cameroon, she defends her performance in interview, saying:

> *I speak of love because I don't like war and politics. Madness, everyone needs some at one time or another, to know if one exists. I know what I do. This madness enables us to alleviate accumulated stress. In these times, we have the right and the need to laugh and to heal certain small diseases. And I think that I was born to make others laugh. I accept this place. I am not vulgar, I do not make vulgar spectacles. If I am vulgar, then the Ewondo language is vulgar.*
> (Cameroon-Info.Net 2004)

She alludes to two things here: the dysfunctional nature of the political system, and the foundation of bikutsi rooted in the mastery of the Ewondo language. While veiled innuendo and metaphor still existed in many instances, though not in all, the dances became parodies of sex, and were often accompanied by graphic lyrical imagery. Cameroonian music writer Mono Ndjana wrote that the sociological in art had indeed become the biological.

If, as has been suggested, we are to look at the Cameroonian media as the voice and guardian of official state power, it is possible to see these developments as the CRTV losing control of that facade, and it was certainly viewed that way from within. Minister of Information and Director General of CRTV Mendo Ze

made it his personal mission to re-moralize society. First, a moral crisis was declared. That was quickly followed by a cultural crisis as well.

In reaction to the moral dilemma, music video shows such as Tubevision and Clipbox, easily some of the most popular programming on air, were drastically curtailed or cancelled outright. The weekly cultural and news show, TamTam Weekend, replaced its live music with recorded playback of makossa songs, which had always been deemed eminently safe for Cameroonian culture.

The reaction to the cultural dilemma was to effectively ban the recordings and videos of Congolese ndombolo and Ivoiren mapouka in order to avoid "promoting indecent behavior" among the country's youth. These are styles of dance music rhythmically similar to Congolese rumba or soukous, but incorporating sexually suggestive dance with varying degrees of nudity. According to Mendo Ze, the dances had to be banned in order to "safeguard the good morals and culture of Cameroonian society from foreign invasion. Suggestive body wriggling," he commented, "cannot be tolerated."

The move played nicely into the themes of cultural crisis and loss, as the CRTV officially lamented that it had been playing ndombolo as if Cameroonian music did not exist, and hoped the ban would help revive the culture. Official radio policy following that announcement allowed for 30% time to foreign music. The happiest recipients of this policy were the local makossa musicians, whose music had been in drastic decline thanks to the meteoric rise of bikutsi, and the influx of French pop, ndombolo and rap.

Jean Francois Mebenga, then director of programming at CRTV, commented that, “as state owned media, we have a duty to educate the masses. We have to maintain a certain measure of decent social morals. This dance, played over our radio and television, encourages immortality in our society, especially among the youths. Our people may have a passion for ndombolo, but I think it was a wise decision to ban it.”

The third move, and the one that upset the public most, was the institution of a weekly talk show called *Deviance*, hosted by Mendo Ze himself. *Deviance* tackled topics such as proper aspects of cultural production such as singing and dancing, and the ways people should behave in society, in public and in administration. Dress was particularly stressed; foreign media was decried, especially the so-called “bordello-culture” of the French; of course bikutsi came under fire frequently.

Interestingly, the program was inherently suspect from a public standpoint, as it was deemed improper for a person of Mendo Zé’s stature, age and position to be directing a program of such nature (Bingono: interview). According to public sentiment and cultural convention, the host should have been an anthropologist or sociologist, or even some type of civil servant. More to the point, the words to a popular song at the time called “Deviance” proclaimed that “there are some words that should not appear from the mouth of an elder, a figure of respect.”

The backlash to the media ban on foreign music and video made it apparent that no one was being taken in by the media's political diversion. A notable singer at the time, Mpande Star said, "Let's not fool ourselves. Those who complain that ndombolo is immoral are lazy musicians afraid of competition." The private press was unanimous in its condemnation as well, decrying the ban as merely yielding to laziness and encouraging mediocrity. For many, the ban simply amounted to cultural censorship, or another expression of the totalitarian nature of the system.

Rather I suggest reading these maneuvers by the government and media as reactionary tactics safeguarding their lifestyle and power, as well as taking umbrage to the media developing in ways unpredictable and uncontrollable. If we look closely, at least to the bikutsi element, we find that criticism, obscenity, and the notion of female power had been there from the very beginning. And while some have lamented the passage of "the oblique and suggestive approach," postcolonial feminist theory creates space for this so-called transgressive behavior (Suleri 1992). In the political anxiety that modernizing nations exhibit to prove their traditional culture remains intact, national rhetoric often calls upon women to be the bearer and transmitter of culture and tradition. Men in these instances have the ability to move across spheres of influence, negotiating the modern and the traditional as need dictates. Regressive policies such as those enacted by the CRTV limit this ability for women.

> *Excluded from the social administration, Beti women find in bikutsi a privileged way of expression, as it allies creativity, poetry and musical expressiveness in defining their own space and voice. Women write their lyrics spontaneously with a particular sense of precision. One at the time they dance in the middle of a circle, teasing and encouraging each other. They take inspiration from true topics and they receive congratulations for the richness, the truth and the rhymes of their verse.* (Noah).

In discussing the sexualized nature of language, various feminist theorists have started from the premise that language structures themselves are gendered by nature. Thus entering into the world is to enter into a structure of language and being that has already assigned meaning to expressive modes. Theorizing female sexuality and subjectivity, for example, both Cixous and Irigaray contend that the world is divided into series of binaries—male/female, language/silence, self/other. These binaries operate within systems of valuations in which the masculine is granted a privilege and power that extend as well to the phallo-centricity and logo-centricity of Western thought and knowledge production. Thus, phallogo-centricity devalues female modes of expression, recognizing the masculine as the Self while creating the feminine Other (Cixous 1975, Irigaray 1977).

This repeated othering creates a scenario in which the female and the feminine are considered in terms of their derivation from the male center. This act appears as naturalized so that masculinist discourses are taken as normative. However, both Cixous and Irigiray note that female expressive modes and sexuality are not identical to male expression, sexuality or language.

If language is not gender neutral but is instead part of masculinist discourse, perhaps there exists a feminine language that resonates with feminine modes of expression. This would not resemble normative masculinist language systems, but rather rejects Western philosophical traditions of universal subjecthood. Instead what emerges is a theory of difference in which female expression and sexuality is posited not in contrast to normative systems, but as positive and independently valued.

It is possible to note the gendering and sexualization of language structures in the work of K-tino, and while it could be argued that her usage of masculinist discourses, systems of language and appropriation of globalized symbols of female sexuality impinges on her transgressive nature, a more productive reading shows her challenging power structures in significant ways. The re-signification of a "masculine" media system is one such result. If we argue that K-tino does not create a feminine expressive style, autonomous from masculinist discourses of power, but instead presents an emergent feminine style, we might re-formulate the concept of the feminine and its relationship to the masculine itself.

Her performances of sexuality contain knowledge of the public discourse surrounding the female body, as evidenced in the manner in which she provokes both male and female dancers in her videos. Here she acts as a social critic, moving between masculine and feminine sexuality and allowing her body to perform sexual aggression as both pursuer and receiver. K-tino's performances

contribute to the realization of a female subjectivity by deconstructing typified female public sexuality and by claiming global erotic symbols of the female body. In fact, she performs not a reflection of female othering so much as an appropriation and re-performance of these symbols. In her performances, K-tino demonstrates a control and awareness of not only her erotic body, but also an awareness of the reaction in the critique she encounters.

She says, "If I am vulgar, than Ewondo is vulgar," revealing the way in which language works as a socialization tool, and more relevant to our discussion, how Beti women have historically utilized singing to manipulate masculinist language structures into powerful transformative spaces. Ultimately, this shows that if phallo-centric language structures are perhaps inherently repressive, and women's voices have been continuously marginalized, female expression is still not determined by the systems in which they are located. Instead, K-tino demonstrates a female expression constantly developed though performance. She finds innovative ways to critique existing power structures by addressing their sexuality and subjectivity, and by manipulating both media and language.

K-Tino's music highlights the significance of tradition in women's musical expression over time and beyond urban/rural, modern/traditional binaries. In a previous form, bikutsi served as an erotic socialization process among women. Although the space in which K-Tino operates is more "public" and the manipulation of the media and inclusion of erotic physical movements creates a

seeming disjuncture between the two musics, I would argue that a careful listening of her music shows a creative transformation of tradition.

This is especially significant in understanding women's music making in an African landscape in which modernity and its products are often assigned exclusively to men. This accounts for much of the critique and backlash against modern bikutsi as the deviation and degeneration of traditional culture. In this conception men have access to participate in modernity while women are assigned the realm of tradition. This allows men to control women's access to expression, critique, and ownership of their sexuality and their bodies. Female bikutsi musicians such as K-Tino are showing that not only do they have access to modernity through manipulation of the media, appropriation of globalized erotic signs, and willful neglect of traditional feminine roles, they have in fact always had the ability to participate in what those in power had strived to deny them.

If bikutsi has always been about creating space and voice, then in the new media landscape of Cameroon, the voices choose to be louder, and often share in, as well as mock the tastes and habits of the men in power. For instance, popular rumor often refers to Mendo Ze, a committed Catholic and mariologue (follower of the Virgin Mary) rather as serpentologue (a Rosicrucian whose mystical totem is a boa constrictor). It has been said that Ze gains and maintains his power by sucking the menstrual blood of young virgins whom he entices with gifts of money and jewelry, usually in the form of a gold snake necklace. Mbembe writes, "Men in power at different levels of society are represented as men consumed by

phallocratic passions, and they are ridiculed and debased by the girls and women they often imagine themselves to be debasing. The rebellious chants show the political dimension of the cultural creativity of Cameroonian women… the revolt and the rupture is expressed in song" (Mbembe 2001: 127). I maintain the recent developments of bikutsi fall under this paradigm, as an attempt by performing women to re-establish that critical voice and direct it perhaps derisively, perhaps obscenely, at those on top.

Essono wrote that "nowadays men as well as women sing bikutsi and their message stays the same. Nowadays they speak clearly to the power; they claim their rights, say their deceptions and sorrows for the future of their children, complain about corruption" (Essono 1996: 54). The traditional themes of love and sexuality, feminine strength, family and life education continue to be dominant in contemporary bikutsi, though the stylistic liberties in language, dance and visual imagery have expanded to fill the media space it inhabits.

But in the face of overwhelming Beti modesty and shame, the question of obscenity remains. Coming back to Baudrillard, he wrote that obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, theatre or illusion. Thus, only when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, and exposed in the raw inexorable light of information and communication do we confront the obscene. If this is true, then the truly obscene can only happen when there is no more illusion to the exercise of power, when we can see it for all its exhibitionism. If both the public and private space are disintegrating, that is, the

body, the landscape and time as a stage are disappearing, then the truly obscene, as he says, occurs when "the most intimate operation of your life becomes the potential grazing ground of the media." The obscene then no longer contains a secret. That is the moment the autocrat should worry.

Chapter Four

Revisiting the Local Record Industry:
the Formation of Digital Collectives in Cameroon

This chapter is the result of a now on-going project in Cameroon, a US State Department invitation to participate in their Cultural Envoy Program in 2006. During my fieldwork I was approached by the Embassy Cultural Affairs Section and asked if there was something we might be able to contribute to the music community. What might be of use to the music industry in Cameroon? Information. And software. And training. I related the concerns and needs of everyone I had met in the music community during my previous year of fieldwork. Those needs were, in short, digital recording technology. The demand for information, recording software training, and indeed the hardware itself, led to a US government funded project of building and installing a digital recording studio in Yaoundé, in the cultural center called Africréa. It would eventually come to be overseen by a local arts commission and available to the general music community, at minimal operating costs.

Figure 23: Africréa before

Working with a group of young desktop engineers and producers introduced me to a number of interesting developments at the time, and led me to re-visit the formidable *Music in Small Countries* project undertaken by Krister Malm and Roger Wallis in the 1970s and 80s (Wallis and Malm 1984, 1993). More specifically, I was interested in the exploration of government media policies and how they influence the struggle between foreign media content vs. local music activity. As they point out, all too often local politicians seem content to sit on the fence and "wait and see what happens," while technological and economic factors enjoy a free-for-all, mapping out new media landscapes.

Figures 24-25: Studio Nyanga after

The original project, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples*, charted the flow of music industry technology and products to virtually every corner of the globe, observing some of the ways in which this development assisted or came into conflict with national and local cultural interests. As they found in the 1970s, the problems faced by cultural policymakers were mainly concerned with the availability of music industry technology and the uses to which it was put. One of the fallouts was that those who cannot keep up with technological developments in primary music mass media run the risk of being excluded from secondary sources.

However, what I found in Cameroon seemed to entirely precede those findings, or even the argument itself. Instead, the questions in Cameroon fell more along the lines of, What happens when the possibility of local content disappears altogether? or What of a government cultural policy that neglects the music and recording industry until it barely exists? and How do you survive as an artist if more than 90% of record sales are of the pirated variety? Despite the fact that I was asking these questions thirty years later, I felt that the position of the music industry was perhaps at a pre-1970s level. Indeed, as I was to discover, not only had the recording and music industry died of utter neglect, but in some spectacular cases, it was done in by a blunt object. Still, in the end there are a few people finding ways to get things done, and mostly on their own terms. And that is where this story begins.

Using the example of the then newly-formed independent co-operative Culture Mboa Collectif, I demonstrate a model for contemporary art that contaminates the present day domains of both art and politics. Mboa and its founder Ruben Binam have developed a union of musicians and technicians that, for the first time in Cameroon, owns and oversees every aspect of production, from recording and design to distribution. This dynamic contests the government's control and discourse of the music industry and its recent decline, as well as its tacit complicity with the pirate music market.

Concurrently, recent music scholarship and press in Cameroon have noted the increase in protest songs leading to the convergence of popular music and popular causes, without the allure, or even possibility of political patronage. I argue that it is the new media and technologies such as digital recording and duplication that allow a generation of cultural practitioners a multiplicity of what Michel Gaillot refers to as "elective communities," which no longer rely on a factual belonging to state, nation, or ideology (Gaillot 1998: 42). According to Gaillot, these Do-it-Yourself, cultural youth formations are "passional" communities that assert control over an array of technologies and media, variously establishing a liberated space motivated by ethics and standards of social justice.

Cameroon's media-scape has undergone dynamic and for some, unsettling changes in recent years. The state-controlled audio-visual sector, which has been absolute since its inception in 1986, has gradually loosened to allow private radio

since 2000, along with a few fledgling television concerns since 2005. Although in principle, private radio and television have been allowed by law since 1990, as of yet no licenses have been issued, thus leaving the door open to government harassment and in some cases violence. I had the odd phone conversation one morning with Pius Njawe, the celebrated newspaper publisher, radio broadcaster and self-proclaimed freedom fighter. He was sorry he had to cancel our interview that afternoon. Unfortunately, gendarmes had locked his radio station down and were currently trying to burn it. I told him I understood.

As the Cameroonian media undergoes a process of democratization highly influenced by foreign media and government, local musicians and video artists have become actors in a conflicted and uncertain environment. On the one hand are issues of nation-building and cultural development in the face of dominant foreign media, and on the other, the multitude of images, sounds and forms of popular culture that people attach themselves to in their daily imaginings.

In its heyday in the 1980s, the Cameroon National Radio Studio produced more than 40 albums a year, however the German-donated equipment there has long ceased functioning. Today there exists one demo-quality recording studio in Douala, and none in the capital city of Yaoundé. The studio is owned by the wealthy son of a prominent government minister, and it takes a considerable amount of patronage, or high-level influence to gain access there. There are 2 CD duplication centers in Douala, though most artists are hesitant to use them because

of their inferior quality, and for the universal fear that they are in fact the heart of the pirate music industry.

On the retail end, only one legitimate, and by that I mean government-sanctioned, royalty supported record store operates in Yaoundé, MCPoP. It sells legal CDs, government stamped by the Cameroon Music Corporation (previously SOCIDRA, SOCINADA, now SOCAM) for anywhere from 13 to 18 dollars, which is beyond the budget of most Cameroonians. And it is locally understood that even though the store works in conjunction with the CMC, it also sells pirated, though stamped, copies of CDs as well. Meanwhile, the market stalls and hawkers selling pirated copies of albums (99-song mixes for 50 cents to a dollar), service what market there is for popular music across Cameroon, just as in many west and central African countries.

In many ways this is a story of the continuing struggle to wrest control of the artistic process, as well as ownership of the artwork and profits of its sale. Lack of studio facilities, duplication, distribution and sales points make it nearly impossible to create anything of value, or have that value realized in spite of the piracy and corruption. Securing what means exist often involves finding a producer who will cover expenses, but always at the cost of copyright, back-end costs, and extortion fees. And as I unhappily discovered, in the case of female artists, there is often the implied expectation of sexual exchange.

Unfortunately the Cameroon Music Corporation, which handles artists rights and royalties, and charges for each cassette and CD stamp, as well as artist

membership dues, has no way to account for music or video diffusion. And every few years their license is inevitably revoked and they're shut down by the government and restructured for reasons of corruption, mismanagement or embezzling. But of course by that time, the allotted budget has "been disappeared." As Ruben Binam explained it in interview, "the CMC operates like the sort of patron society that is created in a lot of places in Africa. You get nothing until you need something, and then you get a little bit by asking for it. As far as regulated work exchange value, that doesn't really exist."

Of course this is just another reference to what Bayart has termed the Big Man complex in Africa, or politics of the belly (Bayart 1993). It is not uncommon for the big man to be influenced by the ethos of munificence, or to make a point of honor in doing so. However, it is more common for generosity to be imposed upon him by kinship, flattery or the accusations of witchcraft. In this way, the small men work a form of political innovation that insures the redistribution of wealth. Binam says, "As long as a little money falls down, everybody's going to be happy. If the money stops coming down, then you have jealousy and insecurity and resentment. But that is not the way these businesses are supposed to operate."

Macase (my house)

The story of Culture Mboa actually begins in 1998 when Ruben Binam started the popular band called Macase. They played a mix of local styles

including bikutsi, assiko and makossa, and had a very smooth polished style after their Cameroonian heroes Richard Bona and Sally Nyolo. After achieving a relative degree of local success, they sought out noted musician and radio executive Sam Mbende to produce the band. Mbende recorded their first CD, but immediately after got sidetracked with his own highly successful career, a record release and a radio show. Not sensing any immediate payback, he promptly lost interest in the band and ignored their development. At the same time however, he owned the copyrights to the record and had the band under contract for 3 years.

Figure 26: Macase at rehearsal

At some point, Mbende's disinterest and Macase's dissatisfaction prompted both parties to come to a mutual agreement for terminating the contract, and Macase then took it upon themselves to promote the band and continue touring on their own. By 2001, they were arguably the biggest act in Cameroon, and the group was selected for the MASA (Arts and Spectacles Marketing) Festival in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, where they eventually won a professional demo recording session, along with sizable amount of prize money. The demo was a surprise to everyone, and was in turn sent to Radio France International, where it won the RFI World Music Discoveries Award. This prize came with a Paris recording contract and a major European tour. They were now an unqualified success.

Unfortunately, Sam Mbende came to realize how lucrative the band was becoming. He denied ever receiving the contract termination papers (impossible to prove), and brought legal action against RFI, demanding some 50,000 (US) dollars in management fees if RFI were to continue to work with the group. Of course, in by now a somewhat familiar story, RFI instead promptly dumped the band, rescinded the prize money, and effectively ended whatever career momentum Macase had built up to that point outside of Cameroon. They returned home broken and with only a new set of equipment to show for it.

Mbende, meanwhile, in an absolutely devious stroke, had invoked a renewal clause buried in their contract and completely unknown to the band. He spent the next 3 years extorting performance money from the band until they

could buy their way out of their contract for $16,000 (he eventually settled for $8,000).

A postnote to this story, and what can only be considered a tragic irony: Sam Mbende in 2005 became the president of the CMC, thus becoming the single voice effectively in charge of overseeing the legal rights, financial interests and development of all Cameroonian musicians.

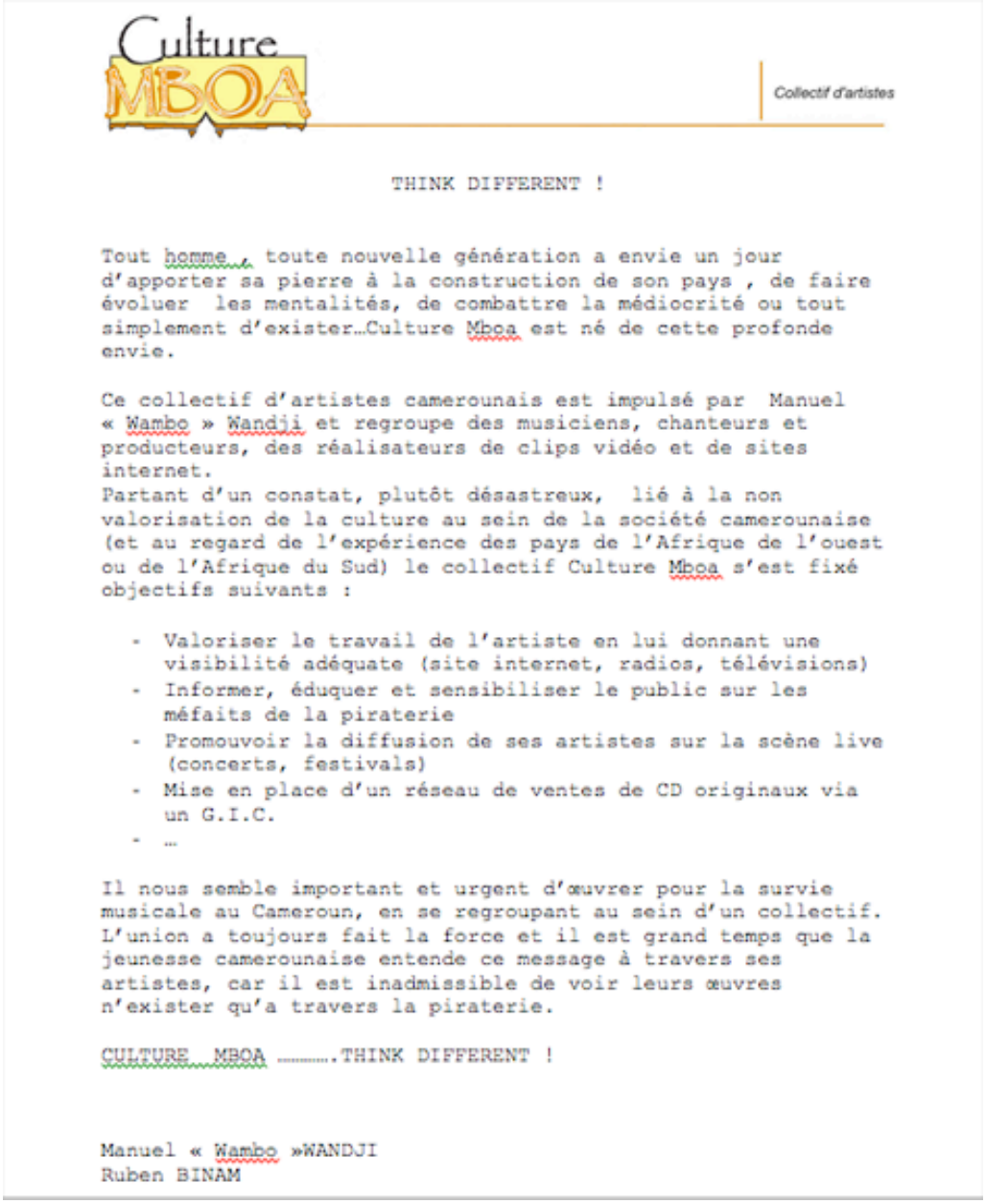
Culture Mboa

While rebuilding the band's reputation in the following years, Binam dedicated himself to the idea of Culture Mboa as a way of gathering into a collective all the forces the artistic community would need to remain beyond the reach of the government's influence, as well as corrupt producers and pirates. Key to this notion, and the principle upon which Mboa was built, is the ideal of fostering an artist's career. If nothing else, Macase and Mbende had taught everyone an unforgettable lesson.

Culture Mboa is a partnership that exists between Ruben Binam, who runs a secretive but highly effective digital garage studio in Yaoundé, and Emanuel Wandji, a Cameroonian producer who lives in Paris. Binam decides which of the available roster is ready for recording, handles the production, recording and mixes the CD, and sends the files to Wandji Paris, who designs the artwork and has the CDs printed in Hong Kong. The quality is somewhat high and the

possibility of pirated copies getting back to Cameroon is very low. Binam then handles the distribution through custom-designed kiosks around Yaoundé and Douala. These mostly exist in larger, Western style supermarkets and cabarets. Though not a dollar, the discs sell for a reasonable eight dollars, with Mboa currently averaging over 100 sales a month. That money is strictly accounted for, and minus production costs (again, minimal) goes straight back to the artist.

One stipulation is that every artist part of the concern must be available to promote the project, and participate in public education against piracy and corruption. There are sample video spots that played on local television with the artists imploring Cameroonians to support the musicians and not purchase pirate CDs. As Binam says, "It's a movement. It's not a label just for commercial aims. The organizers are artists who need other artists to be with them, to make something different, to build a project, to lead a project, and to make it live." To that end, the Cultural Mboa manifesto proposes 4 main objectives: to valorize the work of artists and give it adequate visibility, to inform and educate the public of the misdeeds of piracy, to promote the live appearances of the artists, and to provide a place of sales for original work.



Culture MBOA

Collectif d'artistes

THINK DIFFERENT !

Tout homme , toute nouvelle génération a envie un jour d'apporter sa pierre à la construction de son pays , de faire évoluer les mentalités, de combattre la médiocrité ou tout simplement d'exister…Culture Mboa est né de cette profonde envie.

Ce collectif d'artistes camerounais est impulsé par Manuel « Wambo » Wandji et regroupe des musiciens, chanteurs et producteurs, des réalisateurs de clips vidéo et de sites internet.
Partant d'un constat, plutôt désastreux, lié à la non valorisation de la culture au sein de la société camerounaise (et au regard de l'expérience des pays de l'Afrique de l'ouest ou de l'Afrique du Sud) le collectif Culture Mboa s'est fixé objectifs suivants :

- Valoriser le travail de l'artiste en lui donnant une visibilité adéquate (site internet, radios, télévisions)
- Informer, éduquer et sensibiliser le public sur les méfaits de la piraterie
- Promouvoir la diffusion de ses artistes sur la scène live (concerts, festivals)
- Mise en place d'un réseau de ventes de CD originaux via un G.I.C.
- …

Il nous semble important et urgent d'œuvrer pour la survie musicale au Cameroun, en se regroupant au sein d'un collectif. L'union a toujours fait la force et il est grand temps que la jeunesse camerounaise entende ce message à travers ses artistes, car il est inadmissible de voir leurs œuvres n'exister qu'a travers la piraterie.

CULTURE MBOA …….THINK DIFFERENT !

Manuel « Wambo »WANDJI
Ruben BINAM

Figure 27: Mboa manifesto

The crux here is an understanding of something greater beyond the scope of capital, perhaps a "structure of feeling" as Raymond Williams called it. Binam

is obviously passionate, which is a small wonder considering all the disappointment:

> *I need to do something concerning African music. I need to try to make things change. I'm talking about the technical conditions of working, the way artists are considered inside the country and outside, because they don't consider our work as normal work. They consider that when you are an artist, you do nothing. You are doing nothing useful for the society. And that's why Culture Mboa. We need to be recognized and we need to work here and we need to live here, normally, just as somebody who is a banker; just as somebody who is a lawyer, just as somebody who sells tomatoes in the market.*

Beyond the practicalities of production and consumption, I argue that Culture Mboa realize a greater existence among the artistic community in Cameroon, and perhaps serve as a model for other developing, or more importantly, exhausted record industries. The abilities of digital technology, and the obligation to resuscitate the artistic image and livelihood of Cameroonian musicians give Mboa and others who follow them the opportunity for alliances woven, as Gaillot says, "beyond the level of communities of fact and obligation." This leads to what he calls "elective communities," and makes for the most open and free communities possible: that is, non-prescriptive and non-coerced, where ethnic, racial, religious, and political determinations are mixed and suspended (Gaillot 1998: 42).

Here what was once private, such as taste and feeling, becomes public and the ground for being-together, just as what was public or social, such as the religious, the racial, or the ethnic, tends instead to become private. We then

witness the emergence of smaller communities based on extremely fluid ties, and temporarily articulated around freely shared passions or feelings.

This line of thinking is not necessarily new, of course. There is the spectre of it in Bourdieu's notion of *communitas*. While Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" seems to be a likely precedent (Anderson 1983). However I would maintain that Anderson's conception relies on a by-now outmoded sense of nationalism (bankrupt) in Africa. More importantly, it is helpful to envision the imagined community as one at least as effective across spaces with the unknown, or taken on faith. I liken the elective community as a more contiguous entity, with an efficacious intimacy.

Perhaps what comes closest is Weber's notion of "elective affinities," though was rather amorphous about its intricacies. Howe has speculated it according to "mechanistic causalism," while stating that despite its value-free stance, the elective affinity of similar ideal sill allow the circle of its contributors to hold together and to recruit new members" (Howe 1978: 366). For Weber, who confronted the chaos of the world, there existed an order for the actor in history and that affected history's course. Thus the logic of history would be the logic of the elective affinities. I would argue that what is happening in Cameroon, more practically on the civil society scale than anything, has only the power to disrupt any such logic to history, and on a micro scale, a pinpoint moment.

What is important for situations such as Culture Mboa lies in the ability not only to mix and cross-breed sources of information like sounds, visuals and

text, but to make anyone into not only a receiver, but a creator and a transmitter. If we consider a lack of possible emancipatory effect except through technology, the latter is real and effective only when it is shared and democratized; it can no longer remain a matter for specialists or technicians. It is the interactivity between man and machine that creates the possibility of no longer remaining a spectator. To go back to McLuhan, those who select and control information determine the figuration of the work and of our existence.

Although I'm hesitant to extend this idea too far, as Maffesoli transmits this type of temporary sociability farther into fete (Maffesoli 1993), it does add an interesting sub-text to Achille Mbembe's inversion of the carnivalesque in analyzing the Cameroonian power structure. This space often overlaps with that of the elite or governing class in an intimacy, almost a complicity we might say, that turns power and play into everyday performance.

One perhaps unexpected result of this convergence of alliances, especially between the independent record producers and the independently developing media, is the proliferation of protest songs. Cameroonian media critic Francis Nyamnjoh has written of the emergence of makossa artists such as the venerable Lapiro de Mbanga, whose songs employ Pidgin English lyrics to signify the personal and collective experiences of the common people, and whose current songs reproach the government of President Paul Biya for its growing corruption and inability to change the status quo (Nyamnjoh 2005: 265).

Figure 28: The power of language

As well, recent press, such as the BBC news online (Dec 2007) has chronicled a burgeoning new style focused specifically on anti-corruption called "revolutionary song." Popular artists such as Longue Longue sing lyrics such as, "Biya, you promised change, but what do you want to change, the tax money you are swindling, or the constitution?" They demand in these songs that specific ministers be sent directly to Kondengui prison, and infamous detention center in Yaoundé. And while the practice of protest singing is not necessary new to Cameroon—for instance traditional bikutsi artists from the village have always had a relative degree of freedom of speech in society—it was only after the advent of independent production and non-governmental media that artists began to sing with impunity against the regime in the name of democracy.

If this new digital wave is one in which technology no longer alienates, but instead offers the possibility of a revised sense of gemeinschaft—and by this I mean a shared set of common beliefs, concentrated ties and frequent interactions at a distance from a power center—then the recent phenomenon of digital music collectives in Cameroon promises greater connivance, complicity and convergence between popular music and popular causes.

Here the interaction between the recording industry, the political system that has previously owned it, and the popular music it helps produce aptly shows how the conscious use of technology and the media are ways of maximizing the possibilities that represent the sphere of music performance, allowing for a more total saturation, and indeed an overflow, of the usual limits of production and reception.

Binam, perhaps, puts it best:

> *Another reason is the context. Art is not considered as having an economic power. Perhaps it's time for us to work and to consider that we can get into the world market through the quality of our production and artistic projects. Perhaps it may be a way of starting this process; trying to be known outside of Africa and outside the country; trying to sell something outside of Cameroon. Perhaps it will make it possible to live in our own country, and have this credibility. That's what I think and that's what I'm trying to organize myself.*

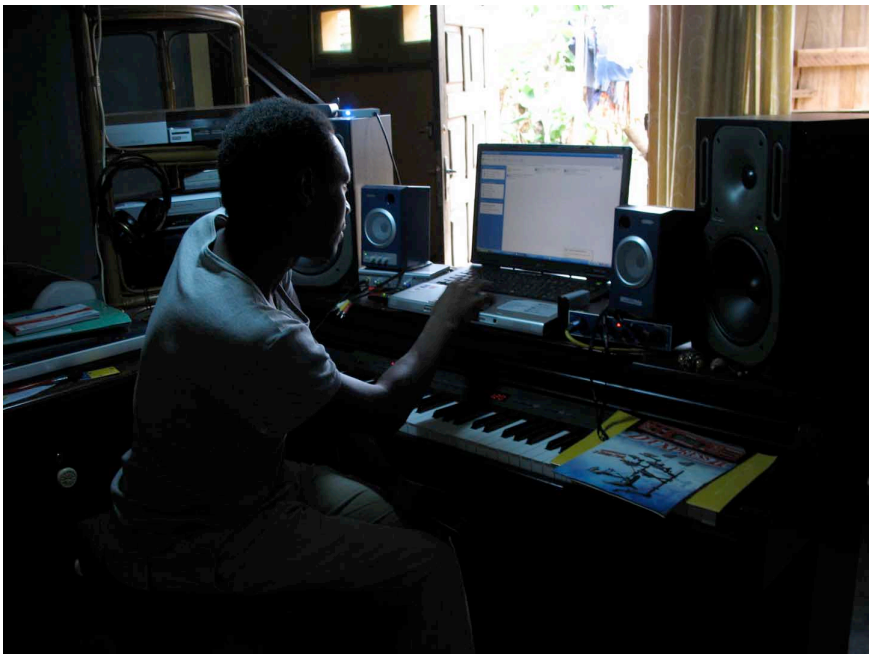


Figure 29: Binam at work in the garage

Cameroonian government declarations have often stressed the importance of government media in the attainment of cultural, economic and political development objectives. However, I maintain it is the digitally savvy and media-enabled youth that will play a leading role in disseminating information and mobilizing Cameroonians toward self-reliance, autonomy and independence in economic, cultural and political matters, leaving behind what local sidewalk radio has often called "the Cameroon of wait and see."

Chapter Five

Pour La Transparence: the CMC, the African Media Federation and the Failure of Organization

Even before I had a real chance to settle into Cameroon--in fact I was still sleeping on Ahanda's couch--the entirety of the country's musical world was summoned to the Palais de Congrès for the re-formation of the Cameroon Music Corporation, or CMC, and voting in of a new president. The CMC had been defunct for over a year, the previous incarnation having collapsed under the direction of Manu Dibango, who oversaw operations from Brussels. Somehow, his budget had disappeared, and the musicians were no longer able to secure what little royalties that might have been available.

The idea of having someone protecting artist rights from overseas struck me as odd, until I learned that royalties, or droits voisin, didn't necessarily come from legitimate sources. Instead, in typical "big man" fashion, a budget was accrued, and money was trickled down as an artist might need, or apply for. Actual record sales or playback accounting didn't occur. In fact, before there was the CMC, there was SOCIDRA, and before that SOCINADA, and before that the Committee for Artistic Rights, and all followed the same pattern. The government grants a budget to a director, the budget disappears, and sooner or later the society is folded. Now I understood Dibango as having a vantage from overseas, as to be

able to secure more funds from abroad, acting as more of a development director than someone who was looking out for the legal and financial rights of the music community.

What followed that day was one of the more perverse demonstrations of Roberts Rules than I could have imagined, lasting from 7am to somewhere after 10pm. After 15 hours of debate, no vote was ever taken, however there was a president and a board, and the CMC was back in business. Obviously there were more forces at work here than I imagined, besides ostensibly electing a new director who had apparently been pre-ordained.

This chapter will briefly examine two conferences, the CMC at the beginning of my work and sponsored by the Cameroonian government, and the Inter-African Media Federation, which took place in Douala and was sponsored by the United States government. In each case, what was expected to happen on the surface apparently never did happen, and yet something definitely got accomplished. However the failure of both governments' ability to engender a culture of organization, perhaps without fear of the preternatural accumulation of power and wealth, presents a startling similarity.

Dominic Thomas presents a good starting point in his discussion of national conferences in Francophone Africa. He calls them a "unique forum for discussion in their objective of creating a more inclusive discursive site, one that would incorporate a broad range of voices in the process of defining and even imagining the country's trajectory" (Thomas 2002: 163). For him, conferences

have the ability to delineate parameters of reform, confront the past, and a dialogue and ritual for restoration. These would have seemed apt criteria for the re-formation of the CMC. And yet, one questions if necessary reform or restoration had actually taken place.

The event was obviously thought to be important. Every name musician in the country had driven into Yaoundé for the event. I saw and met every Cameroonian artist I had ever heard of, and had pictures taken with Bebe Manga, who wrote the international hit "Ami O". It seemed a grand affair, and the first few hours were spent socializing in the lobby of the Palais. What was also happening was an intense politicking, however, with factions being drawn, alliances set, and strategies formed. The intrigue was building, and I was excited to see how the election would play out. Obviously Dibango hadn't taken care of business the way people had hoped. But there was optimism for a new era, one of transparency.

> In accordance with the statutes and the general payment, within the framework of its mission of recasting of the CMC and the adoption of its fundamental texts, the commission of revision of the texts sets up a mode of nonexhaustive indemnity, the purpose of which is to return transparency to all the activities of the board of trustees, of the regulatory commission and statutes issued by the extraordinary general meeting of recasting on 16 April 2005, to impel a new and dynamic orientation to the CMC.
>
> --from the Projet de Régime Indemnitaire de la CMC

Instead what happened was hours and hours of speeches, interspersed with readings from the statutes, followed by shouts of "Adopted!" Even the new budget was passed out. And finally came the time for voting new officers. First nominations were taken, and each nomination had to be accompanied by a sheet of 50 signatures of petition. An hour or two later, there were four parties, though one got disqualified for lack of sincerity, and another for not submitting signatures in the correct form.

Suddenly, t-shirts were being handed out with Sam Mbende's face on them, and the slogan "Pour la Transparence." Something seemed amiss. And amid the uproar, Mbende's people and the opposing party stepped out into the hall, and when they came back, Mbende was president of the new CMC. Somehow the opposition had been persuaded to step down. And while hundreds of musicians had traveled to participate and have a stake in their livelihood, no vote had been taken.

Figure 30: bikutsi musician with Sam Mbende's campaign shirt

And maybe that's the point. Thomas suggests a re-using of the notion of African *palabre* for its logo-therapeutic value. That is, simply to participate already constitutes an implicit commitment and consent ahead of time to conciliation. He writes that "the National Conference constituted a contemporary manifestation of an organized *palabre*, providing the opportunity for multiple oratorical encounters...through the staging of dialogue, it has the capacity to promise, engage, and allow for reintegration rather than exclusion" (Thomas 2002: 167).

However, Nyamnjoh's work on development narratives and witchcraft offers a more nuanced reading that involves what is referred to as the visible as well as the invisible. He suggests that even the most Afrocentric descriptions or models of analysis explicitly or implicitly refer to categories and conceptual systems that depend on a western epistemological order, as if African weltanschauung and African traditional system of thought are unthinkable.

For him, the multi-dimensionality in Cameroon has equal space for all the senses, as well as the invisible, the emotional and the sentimental. According to Nyamnjoh,

> "western discourses on development and democracy tend to recognize individuals and nations sates as real, but either ignore the existence of intermediate communities, or treat them as backsliding on the long march toward modernity. Traditional Africans see and treat the individual as a child of the community, allowed to pursue needs but not greed. Agency has meaning only as domesticated agency" (Nyamnjoh 2005: 31).

A powerful person is one who can convince others that he or she controls a complex array of visible or invisible forces. Conversely, a person known to have political power is presumed also to have power over the spirit world. As well, he points out that, although most studies of witchcraft have excluded the cities and towns, cosmopolitan Africans pretend to be rationalist in public but indigenous in private.

And I can attest to that fact. One Sunday morning, Jean-Marie called and asked me to come take him to his studio. When I arrived at his corner, he was standing on the street with some flowers. "We need to make a stop," and he

seemed very quiet, so I didn't ask. He directed me high above the city, to a cemetery behind a large Catholic church. Indeed, his teenage son was buried there, and it was birthday. I admit being at a loss for the amount of intimacy the moment contained. We had never discussed anything but music, politics and soccer. And now I was to spend the morning with him at his son's graveside. I sat in silence, but eventually he said the boy had loved to play basketball. Finally, I asked how he had died. Apparently his heart gave out suddenly. I must have looked confused. And then a longer explanation ensued. His grandmother was a well-known and very power woman in the Catholic church, and in fact, a Rosicrucian as well. I knew that in Cameroon secret societies such as Rosicrucians and Freemasons are assumed to have connections with the occult. And it was said that the boy's grandmother had made a terrible sort of deal to gain her great power and influence, and a diviner had told JM that eventually it would cost the boy his life. It was impossible to deny his belief in this.

Practice of witchcraft in these circumstances is tied to a reformulation of market economy termed moral economy, a sort of zero-sum universe in Cameroonian reckoning. The term moral economy as we have come to understand it represents an alternative to the concept of market rationality and its encompassing discourse of modernization. Originally coined by Edward Thompson in his 1960s writing on the eighteenth century food riots in Britain, moral economy is seen in its broadest sense as a form of social protest or direct

popular action, especially with a community being informed by the belief that they are defending traditional rights or customs.

Thus the moral economy should be understood as in dialectic tension with political market economies, whereas the values that marketing assumes are the affirmative role of consumption rather than abstention in life; the link of consumption with happiness, acceptance, and status; the importance of individual freedom as the lack of restraint; and the needlessness of denial and the acceptability of "instant" gratification (Brenkert 1998: 91). What this assumes is the possibility that moral economy models serve only narrow regional and occupational groups at the expense of general welfare, a type of selfish localism or indeed negative utilitarianism. As we can see, moral economies are as much about the negotiation of power as about actual rights.

In this sense, Austen is suggesting that markets may be embedded in other systems of hierarchy, distribution and value, such as the relationship between communal norms and externally centered market economies, and may be a useful tool for analyzing relationships between individual acquisitiveness and other forces, such as witchcraft. Here witchcraft, or the use of preternatural power by one person to damage others (like the aforementioned fear of threat), involves the efficacy of accusation as a direct function of intimacy, i.e. the social relationships involved in accusations, such as between peers, kin, co-wives or the urban-village continuum.

For Cameroon, any mode of introduced capitalism must not only respect individualism, but also embed itself in recognized systems of order, where witchcraft idioms are in competition with the discourses of markets and modernization. Bayart writes that it is not unheard of for a "big man," influenced by the ethos of munificence, to make a point of honor of doing so. However, it is more common for it to be imposed upon him by kinship, flatter or the accusations of witchcraft. This returns us to the 'politics of the belly.' If wealth indicates a potential sign of being at one with the cosmos, then undeserved wealth that does not benefit others can be denounced as a sign of witchcraft. Thus a man who "manages to make good without ensuring that his network share in his prosperity brings shame upon himself and acquires the reputation of 'eating' others in the invisible world" (Bayart 1993: 233). In this way the 'small men,' working political innovation of their own, ensure the redistribution of wealth.

Indeed Austen suggests that fears by newly emergent elites (and use of witchcraft) are common in times of economic transition. Unfortunately for Africans, as Austen points out, their immediate moral targets are other Africans, while they leave the European bases of power mystified to the point where they can only be avoided, not effectively invaded (Austen 2000: 98).

One evening I was to stop at the house of Professor Onguene, who had become one of my project advisors. I had come to respect his great knowledge of Beti cultural history, his love of music, and hatred of politics. He had spent a great deal of time lecturing in France, and his work was formidable. On that night his

daughter, a reporter for the CRTV, met me at the gate. You can't come in tonight. Let's go out instead. When I inquired after her father, she said he was upset, and that one of her aunts had come from the village to visit, unannounced. I thought that was nice, but she looked horrified. "That means she is up to mischief, and will make bad things happen," she explained. "My father doesn't trust her, and is making her sleep in the living room, away from the children. He wants to keep us safe." I was incredulous to hear this, especially about him. But she went on. "When relatives come unexpectedly, they need or want something, and make strange things happen. You have to watch them closely."

And while this might seem strange at first, Comaroff and Comaroff have suggested that urban elite are obsessed with witchcraft and the occult, especially in the context of globalized consumerism. As well, it has been pointed out that sorcery accusations usually occur between family members and is indicative of how much ordinary Cameroonians cherish the solidarity of domesticated agency and how ready they are to protect it from aggression and the harmful pursuit of persona success.

The question of how this reads into the notion of conference participation involves the contradiction between rhetoric of emancipation and empowerment of the individual and the reality of politics not being limited to the transparent as prescribed by liberal democracy. The following is an excerpt from a press release I was hired to write for the Fédération Africaine des Journalistes:

YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon, October 3, 2005 – African journalists have repeatedly called for a truly connected media organization. During the week of October 3, Akwa Palace in Douala, Cameroon will be the site of the first Central African planning sessions of the InterAfrican Press Federation. Building on last year's organizational sessions in Conakry, Cotonou and Bamako, this conference will invite media members to organize, plan and create a functioning body that will foster regional media development for all francophone African countries.

Radio, television, print and Internet professionals will come together for the first time to share problems, progress and opportunities. This effort is only the first step in promoting media advocacy and connectivity, and allowing channels for follow-on training. The aim is to broaden the scope of this endeavour to touch all African countries.

The event officially opens October 3, at the Akwa Palace in Douala. Proceedings and planning sessions begin Monday morning and conclude Wednesday at noon by which time final documents should be adopted. Tentative discussion topics include barriers to honest journalism, standards and ethics codes, training requests, a bilingual web site, links to global media groups, and the ability to help journalists in difficulty.

TOT (training the trainers) sessions begin Wednesday afternoon, and at this point the conference will be opened to all journalists interested in joining pedagogical exercises developed in part by the World Press Freedom Committee and International Center for Journalists. All levels of media sophistication, from top decision makers to young members committed to the process of media democratization, will be welcomed to attend.

By the close of the session, participants will have selected a steering committee, adopted planning documents and planned a web site. To that end, a web site has been developed and hosted in Washington D.C., to be launched during the conference and become the permanent site for the organization. The final documents should include mission and ethics statements reflecting a consensus of the participants involved. It is our overarching goal that this week serve as the foundation of a stronger African media that supports transparency, accountability, good governance, a strong civil society and future economic growth.

Organizations participating in and providing varying levels of operational and financial support include the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Council for the Community of Democracies (CCD), the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC), the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), UNESCO and AllAfrica.com.

What strikes one is what Thomas referred to as a failure to question the assumption of media liberalisms as a Eurocentric construct. He suggested instead that media must develop along lines acceptable to African methodology, and include factors of literacy, audience, distribution and production. What I would add is the performative dimension of conferences.

Figure 31: President Jeremie Sigue of Burkina Faso, and his new executive board

Instead of proceeding according to Washington plans, everyone indeed had their own agenda, jockeying for their own country to be represented on the oversight committee, and distrustful of other factions and geographic locales. In fact, in the end it was decided that each section of the continent had to have their own office, in order that undue influence couldn't be enacted. And the president was chosen from Burkina Faso, thought to be a safer neutral choice. However, months later when he was offered a large grant to gather his committees to him, nothing was in fact heard from him.

Again, this is an excerpt from a press release after the opening day:

> The conference was opened by Cameroon Minister of Communications Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo and American Ambassador Niels Marquardt.
>
> The participants heard Minister Moukoko welcomed them to what he referred to as a milestone in the history of Cameroon journalism.
>
> The Cameroonian Minister expressed pride in the advances made in press freedom in Cameroon, noting that it was especially significant that the conference was taking place in Cameroon. He expressed his appreciation to the U.S. Department of State for selecting Douala as the conference site.
>
> Professor Moukoko urged the delegates to address the following issues:
>
> • the strengthening the national association of journalists, as the foundation for a strong regional network.
>
> He called on the journalists in Africa to establish the rules for their own profession, so that the controversies involving the press would not be resolved by the courts, but by the profession itself.
>
> He expressed pride that Cameroon is finally preparing to issue license for private radio and television.

Figure 32: Minister of Communication Pierre Mbonjo and Ambassador Marquardt

It is interesting to note the remarks of Pierre Moukoko. It wasn't too long after this conference that a number of Cameroonian press journalists were jailed for objectionable content. As well, I had an interview with a radio station owner cancelled on morning of the appointment. It seems the gendarmes had chained his station shut and locked him out. Finally, by the time I had left Cameroon, private licenses had yet to be issued for radio, though that hadn't stopped pirate stations from popping up.

According to Nyamnjoh, recent analyses have explained the resurgence of witchcraft beliefs in mysterious centers of accumulation in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa, with the globalization of poverty, uncertainty, and anxiety

generated by consumer capitalism. It would seem that a more thorough understanding of witchcraft and occult practices in modern Africa will also give a more comprehensive understanding to how they have informed alternative appreciation of development or modernity on the continent.

Certainly the bizarre death of Zanzibar, one of the most beloved of all Cameroonian musicians did not escape this fate. Zanzibar, the wildly talented guitarist and co-founder of Les Têtes Brulée died of a suicide, according to official report, in a country where such a thing is virtually unheard of. But there are almost as many theories as there are people to tell them. The suicide was brought on by a spurned love affair with a girl from the Congo. He was poisoned by Jean-Marie Ahanda, who couldn't bear the idea of Zanzibar being a more popular front man in the band. He killed himself out of shame, rather than be blackmailed into an unwilling homosexual affair with a high-ranking French diplomat. And finally, Tino Baroza, he was done in by sorcery enacted on him by the other, lesser talented guitarists in the country. In the zero-sum universe, somebody who acquires wealth or good fortune has done so at the expense of others. "Those are made into zombies, or given to societies of sorcerers to work for them and produce wealth in return of good fortune" (Nyamnjoh 2005: 42).

Conclusion

Sunday nights at Club Ceto were my favorite time of the week. On that night, Beti women from all over Yaoundé converged in the tiny club for an evening of bikutsi played by a small acoustic mendzan orchestra, and sung by women whose repertoires were both old and expansive. Just as in past decades, men accompanied the singers on xylophones and percussion. However at Ceto it was the women who controlled the dance floor. And what few men patronized the club kept to the background. Here the women enjoyed a degree of freedom of dance and performance rarely seen in other public or social contexts. The songs texts were more risqué than I had heard elsewhere, and also more critical. The dancers more exuberant and outrageous, and the men that dared the floor were often playfully molested. It was the only time I witnessed a proudly "out" lesbian in a country were homosexuality is still considered immoral and is indeed illegal.

In spite of the popularity of this weekly event, it was the only one of its kind in Yaoundé or Douala, at least when I arrived in the country. By the time I had left a little over a year later, the situation had changed considerably. There were small mendzan events appearing unannounced in many quartiers. And in fact, cabarets in general were experiencing a renaissance of sorts, the most upscale of which started with mendzan in the evening. When the electric band performed at night, they started with a set of jazz and American pop and soul

standards. That was followed invariably by a set of makossa classics, and the night stretched into morning with bikutsi after bikutsi.

Obviously, economics and an influx of expendable wealth has to factor in the spate of new club openings. However, in my analysis, it certainly seems as if the then-current climate of media liberalization, indeed cargo playing out at a media level--the image as commodity--had to some degree enable the space and impetus for the renewed expression of culture and critique. If the process of media liberalization has taken away the state media's ability to enact the regime's power of persuasion, the populace is left with a new type of cargo in the form of sounds and imagery to go along with the narrative of global consumer culture.

Since my departure in 2006, all has not played out in accordance with some utopian vision of Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which enables dialogue outside the realm of government or economy, and allows for an equal participation in the critical discourse. Consider the following:

Shortly before I left Cameroon, Blick Bassy, the lead singer of the band Macase, decided to quit the group and move to Paris, like so many aspiring musicians and artists before him. Recently he released an album, *Léman,* that has been critically well received and was reviewed on the August 8, 2009 edition of NPR's *The World*. Bassy worries that Africa is losing not only its own languages and traditions but also its own history. He says, "I am calling young people to go back to the land of history and to learn oral traditions we have there," Bassy says.

"We write our history by ourselves." Yet ironically, he, like Manu Dibango before him, has had to leave Cameroon behind in order to promote its local values.

In May of 2008, Sam Mbende, incumbent President of the Cameroon Music Corporation, was arrested by police for misappropriation of some 50 thousand dollars paid by Les Brassieres du Cameroon. Shortly after his release by the government, Mbende was re-elected to another term as head of the CMC. In another bizarre twist, authorities had cleared most of the voting hall of musicians for lack of identification papers. Mbende was the only candidate present at the vote.

In February of 2009, Mendo Ze, for years the Director of the CRTV and the second most powerful man in Cameroon, was under indictment for embezzlement of up to $1.5 million. Long a favorite of President Biya, Ze has long been known to exhibit grand generosity on politicians and friends outside the realm of media. However, it is hard to imagine he is anything more than a political diversion for Biya.

In October of 2009, the government closed a private unlicensed radio station for broadcasting highly content highly critical of the government. Dementi FM had been on air for approximately six months, yet had not paid the $100,000 deposit for broadcasting license to ensure "administrative tolerance." Dementi's associated newspaper was shut down immediately following.

Another anecdote illustrates the difficulties extant. I worked briefly with a young television host from STV-Douala named Tito. Tito was the image of

modern African youth--short dreads, hip hop designer clothes, perfect rap. He was in charge of the under-20 demographic cultural programming, and had a passion and a vision for the future of television, political activism and the next Cameroonian generation. However, even though STV had a Senegalese manager and foreign financial backing, he expressed to me his countless frustrations and inability to enact any meaningful change in the way media was utilized at the administrative level. For him it was Cameroonian business as usual, and he expressed this most vividly in a rather performative and infamous "letter-to-the-editor" that got circulated amongst the station:

les symptômes Meurtriers le Rêve Défaillant Virused Dream

It began pretty well…
It had all it takes to start an extremely ambitious company, one with the intention to "communicate," one who would forecast on habits, one who would be the long awaited mirror to the then regime-opinioned station, that fatted of just living in the screen boxes of 16 million...people.
One that would be an alternative to a boring, no! Extremely sleeping-pill-effect TV. One that would promote an under looked culture, one that would brighten the darkened portion of this sector, that selfishly discriminates from its growing talents, to weigh on magnifying petty political issues, the same sector that bores itself to un-actual matters, too busy in its soliloquy to self-convincingly sound activist, forgetting once more that like the youth of neighboring Nigeria, we have our heroes, born to fight-type-youths, teenagers making statements and rallying energy to change significant situations in their respective communities…
Yes…it was an appraisable effort, intention, ambition, strive, you name it, as you would have it sound, to be…***Different***.

If you would consider The power of ***Difference*** and the legitimate analysis that puts this word at the origin of most if not all bright ideas of all centuries after Christ…then mathematically, there would be no quacks, deviations or Sudden "Houston we have a problem."!

Canvassing recognition or a favorable opinion from a primitive, brainwashed, cowardly and skeptical population (a**nd I must inform you, the Dream carries national and even international notes…**), is a very delicate operation.
You need the right ***power***, which measures up to how much provisions you can boast of, already in store for the undoubtedly long journey; In business terms, I heard they call it "***capital…***"

With headquarters in the economic capital **(…follow me…)**, this huge capital would provide *to-be homes, cables, lenses, speakers, microphones, chips and microchips* that would earn the project an eye raising accompanied *"wow what a sophisticated technological investment and equipment…!"*, from the bluffed partakers or still to be partners, clients to and in the *"gigantic"* project.
Yes our *Alpha-capital*!...Would provide roof, food, and per diem…**(no!, call it a gesture since that is how his philanthropic engagement to scoring this seemingly easy—penalty—project has been described)**, for the *HAIC* **(Head African In Charge)**. A modest gesture of a little less or more (…for man no de Know…) than a dozen seven digits cfa.

That *HAIC*, like I have chosen to call him, would then in "collabo" **(an often used word in the "to-some-homes" premises)** with the "**Superheads**", "*pick*" in what you would agree given the pedigree of the toppers here, be a highly complex and selective process, those who would execute and make real a **Dream** promised to **16** million in its genesis and over 65 countries from the 5 earthly continents…

…Hey, this is how big this thing is and I'm not even kidding…!

That pick was definitely a pick…!

A pick in which ***power-diggers, lazy hand to-pay-so-called-professional technicians, unmotivated stale heads with the approximately theory and zero practice Directors, uncultivated, narrow-minded communicators***, just enumerating a quarter characteristic of these "**Aliens**", were selectively chosen to lead the dream of till now 2 million people. Ingenious, ridiculous or erroneous…even a Shaka-Zulu reputed strategy-adept wouldn't hold the waters long with this one.

And if you laugh at the moment, I assure you, the **Superheads** don't find this hilarious given the money spent.

Spent…and still being spent is the money, off some off the already cited guilty and cannot-be-proven-innocent-hands that are unshaping the clay put at their pot-mills, steadily molding a scary 'vase'/artwork that would fool nobody as to the confused state of mind of the molders and the inevitable weak destiny of a cracked clay pot with the responsibility of holding water to quench a 16 million man family's thirst.

Oh money…don't we love the feel of the matter, always a serious matter to fools and wise men, poor and rich men, fast and slow men, Palestine and Jerusalem, America and Addis Ababa…

…But the differences it brings don't exempt the attempt to better excellence, most often to the expense of others; but isn't this where the Adrenal line is drawn…oh sorry "*adrenalin*e" is borne?

> But let me surprise you…Money here is as innocent as Mandela was in 1964 and cannot be accused for dirtying the virgin aspirations of this baby media company.
>
> No! How could workers finger-point money when the salaries are large enough to visibly step-up their living standards, bigger apartments, new shoes, all-paid trips abroad, developing minds in our undeveloped and undeveloping country…remember our "*alpha capital*" has the wand in its hand…
>
> Question! How can it be the dough, when these bird-brained-elephants or better, puffer-fish, carry out their jobs with a crystal-clear painful urge...
> HOW? NO!
> How can one be assigned to communicate and be deaf to one's own inner voice; the first you'll ever hear; that same one that whispers solutions, inventions, intentions and yes! Even prayers…
>
> Is there another way of carrying out this so many times over-coveted job, other than with a fiery passion and inventive commitment that we know the "sen sais" in the art to have e.g. the HAIC himself?
>
> I know not…
> But I know not much you would say…and I would agree pray…
> But I know and of that I am certain today…
> This dream with a right leader and wrong crew, isn't going a long way…
>
> Tito 20/10/05

Obviously the money is there, even if the inspiration, or more importantly the technical ability, is not.

Certainly the Government under Paul isn't about to go without a struggle, to both consolidate his power and economic gain. In April of 2008, amid riots and death in the streets of Douala and Yaoundé, Biya amended the constitution, abolishing term limits and basically enabling him to remain president for life. At the same time, he made it illegal to be tried for crimes committed while in office. While his control of the media and the portrayal of the national image may have

irrevocably slipped, it seems as if the facade of multi-party democracy has disappeared as well.

What is left perhaps, examining the previous case studies, is a turn towards civil society actions, if neoliberalism has failed, and even the collapse of neoliberalism. As in the case of Culture Mboa, voluntary social organizations and institutions that form the basis of functioning society rather than force-backed structures of state or market have the power and potential to transform micro-communities. It is suggested that this is a domain of social life that at once demands protection from, but also provides resistance to the processes of globalization. When media is open to critical and oppositional voices within states systems and without, technology can be a means of liberation as well as restriction, and an alternative to institutional coercion.

Here is an opportunity for those with the skill and imagination to make use of new information, allowing artists, musicians and writers to be the next members of a new civil society. This is what I have referred to as the emancipatory promise of the new cargo cult, where instead of capital accumulation there is only ephemera—signs, sounds and images that multiply and intensify in unpredictable ways. Ultimately, understanding the media process and cargo has the ability to allow individuals to overcome the narrow vision of political machinery, and act as another potential cog in the civil society of meaningful relationships.

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VITA

Dennis Michael Rathnaw attended Detroit Country Day School in Birmingham, Michigan. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1988 with a Bachelor of Arts in English, and continued to study and write poetry in the Naropa Institute's Writing and Poetics program with Allen Ginsberg. While enjoying a successful 8-year performance career that included both tours and recordings of jazz and African music in San Francisco, California, he produced events for the San Francisco Jazz Festival and worked for Fantasy Records in Berkeley, California. In 1997 he entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin to study ethnomusicology. There he founded and directed the afropop ensemble Easy Motion Tourist.

Permanent Address: 1905 Walden Court, Suttons Bay, Michigan 49682

This manuscript was typed by the author.